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FALL 2015

Anglers Journal

A FISHING LIFE

Jim Harrison

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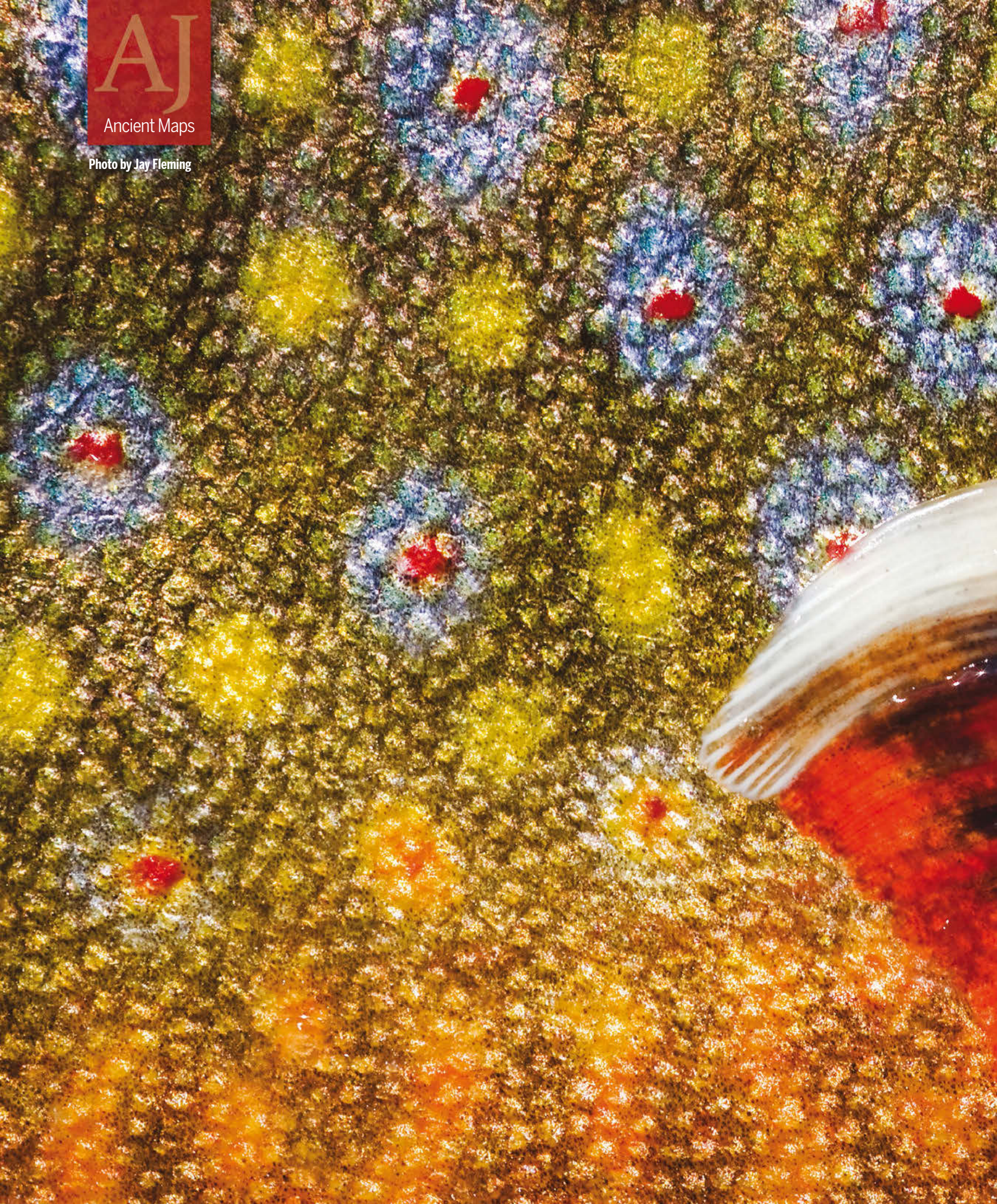
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*Cormac McCarthy
The Road*

Photo by Casey Breeds

"Unless you're the type of person who needs a fishing buddy, you're going to spend many hours in dark, mysterious places where forces that have been long submerged and long forgotten come to the fore. You're going to get frightened for no apparent reason. You may see apparitions. You may feel insignificant."

*Roberto Germani
From Bob Post's Reading the Water*





Photo by Tosh Brown

"When you see a fish you don't think of its scales, do you? You think of its speed, its floating, flashing body seen through the water. ... If I made fins and eyes and scales, I would arrest its movement, give a pattern or shape of reality. I want just the flash of its spirit."

Constantin Brâncusi







Photo by Jim Klug

"The summer sun was not meant for boys like me. Boys like me belonged to the rain."
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Cover photo by Andy Anderson

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Artist A.D. Maddox paints trout in all their finery. Page 60

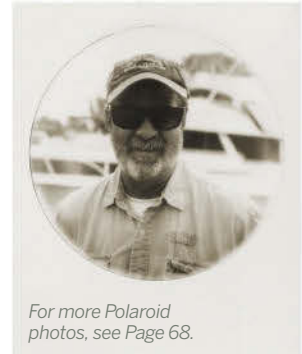


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Headlong Into Fall



The flood pours in from the east, sweeping quietly out of the deep water until it runs into the small reef, where it rears up white and noisy, recharging the shallows with food and cool water and triggering the bass strung out along the broken bottom to feed.

These are familiar stomping grounds, especially on the moons of September and October. Back when this land was a patchwork of farms, you could labor well into the night getting in crops ahead of a killing frost under a harvest moon as brilliant as the one that lifted off the sea horizon two hours ago.

I, too, have been involved in a harvest of sorts this evening, plumb-ing the fast shallows with live eels for the fleeting crop of striped bass fully engaged in the southbound migration. At the end of each drift, I start the engine on my Down East skiff and run east, up-tide, carving big, graceful arcs in the fields of moonlight; I guide the boat outside the red bell and up the channel so as not to spook the fish lying along the top of the submerged ridge. In the half-light, you can see the smooth water quicken, stretch almost, as it nears the reef, “smells” the bottom and rears up.

The fishing is easy and relaxed. The wind is light, and small stand-ing waves collapse on themselves and slap the hull but never threaten to leap the transom and join me in the cockpit. The stripers, too, are small, 6- to 15-pounders. I complain without conviction about how it would be nice if the fish were larger.

Truth is, I am at peace in this familiar little corner of the world il-luminated so softly by the oyster-shell light streaming off the moon. Content with everything we have been given. No other boats to watch over my shoulder. Moon, tide, fish and a friend.

Behind the sleeping seaside village, a reddish-charcoal moon breaks the horizon like the head of a whale.

Up she comes, with the slow majesty of a humpback herding a big ball of herring to the surface. Will she gobble the stars?

Before the moonrise, the Milky Way seems so close you'd swear you could hit it with a good cast from the big rod rigged with one of Whitey's heavy block tin squids.

We are headed home along the backside of Striper Island after a slow pick on a weak tide. We'd hoped for better, but now we have this.

Once we make it through the passage between islands, we turn east and run the colored wake left by the waning moon, called from the

depths by thousands of island crickets whose evening song is a hymn to the season.

Eyes on the sky, the codfish and I proceed across the flats in the sure-footed skiff, slack-jawed, silent.


As fall flees, I drive the sandy back roads looking for bait and bass, for migrating hawks and monarch butterflies, for wind and surf and a sunny corner in the lee of a seawall. A friendly bait shop. Elbow room. My past, present and future.

I search for the season in the light, in a hunch and in the warm, sun-filled front seat of an old station wagon loaded with rods and heavy clothes, overlooking the beach. I close my eyes and doze for 15 minutes.

And I look for something in a conversation with my old friend, whom I meet by chance on one of the empty back roads. We pull over and lean against my car the way workers do in the offseason, when the pace slows and the roads are given back to the locals, the carpenters, landscapers, surfers and fishermen.

I hike down an old footpath to the beach. The tide is low, and I work my way west into a cove where I spent many hours as a kid. There are bluefish on the outside bars and stripers on the inside. The surf is small, waist-high, but there is a good snap to the swell. I am fishing a lead head with a plastic tail, which is the size and color of the finger-length menhaden that everything from cormorants to bonito to blue crabs are feeding on. Casting steadily, I take six fish, three bass and three blues. It is the time of year and the time of day to stop waiting and watching and to simply fish.

Twilight sails in and finds me jotting notes for a few moments, perched on a rock wall where I fished long ago. Looking back, I scarcely know the boy I've pulled from memory. He is standing on the rocks alone, casting. I realize I miss him, which surprises me. I don't think about him very often. He is eager and young and lonely.

The fish and the season explode in front of me once more. I drop the notebook into my backpack, pick up my rod and wade into the gray fall light. 

Bill

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Bill Sisson at wsisson@immedia.com

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Andy Anderson was the first staff photographer for *Men's Journal* and now shoots for *Outside*, *Stern*, *Audubon*, *Condé Nast Traveler* and *Town & Country*, among others, in addition to some of the biggest advertising agencies in the world. His work appears on the cover of this issue, as well as in the Jim Harrison and fall surfcasting features.



Writer and hardcore surf nut **Dave Anderson** has been contributing to East Coast fishing publications since the early 2000s. A former managing editor of *The Fisherman*, he is the editor of the online publication *Surfcasters' Journal*. He spends his nights swimming to offshore rocks in a wetsuit in pursuit of striped bass and his days chasing his 16-month-old daughter around the house.



Michael Cevoli is a commercial and documentary photographer based in southern New England. A graduate of the bachelor's and master's degree programs at the Rhode Island School of Design, he has exhibited his work internationally. His portraits appear in the mates and deckhands feature in this issue.



Photographer **Sam Dole** earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from New York's School of Visual Arts, where he received the Rhodes Award for outstanding achievement in photography. He shoots professionally using a variety of techniques, processes and film, including Polaroid instant snapshots, which appear in the party-boat feature in this issue.



Chris Dombrowski is the author of two books of poetry, most recently *Earth Again* (Wayne State University Press). He lives with his family in western Montana, where he guides for the likes of Jim Harrison and others. His book *Body of Water* about legendary guide David Pinder Sr. and bonefishing on Grand Bahama Island will be available in 2016 from Milkweed Editions.



Jim Flannery is an award-winning journalist who has covered the marine industry for many years. A senior writer for *Soundings* magazine, Flannery interviewed painter A.D. Maddox for the "Poetry of Motion" feature in this issue. His profile of veteran PGA golfer and avid angler Andy Bean will appear in the Winter issue. Flannery lives in South Florida and enjoys wetting a line.

SAM DOLE PHOTO BY JODY DOLE

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Jay Fleming is a photographer based in Annapolis, Maryland, whose work is focused on the fish, wildlife, cultures and landscapes of Chesapeake Bay. His first book, *Working the Water*, which documents the Bay's seafood industry, is scheduled for release next fall. Fleming's work appears in the Opening Spreads and First Light sections of this issue.



A.D. Maddox is a Ducati-riding fly-fishing artist from Nashville, Tennessee. Largely self-taught, she is known for her paintings of trout, a fish she says represents an "intriguing color palette and artistic challenge." Her work has been featured in *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *American Angler*, *Big Sky Journal* and *The Contemporary Sportsman*, as well as the L.L. Bean and Patagonia catalogs.



During his 42 years as a newspaperman, **Arnold Markowitz** covered hurricanes, plane crashes, scandals and swindles. He retired from the *Miami Herald* to fish but didn't lose the urge to write, including a news roundup and fishing column for *Waterfront Times*, published monthly in Fort Lauderdale. He writes about mahi-mahi in this issue.



Rob Roberts is a writer and photographer based in Missoula, Montana. His work has appeared in such magazines as *The Drake*, *Fly Fisherman*, *Backpacker*, *Outdoor America* and *Hang Gliding & Paragliding*, among others. When he's not soaring over the mountains of western Montana, you'll find him plotting his next escape from winter in the Rockies.



A former advertising agency owner, **George Sass Sr.** has had a second career as a marine journalist and photographer. He is a passionate boater who has done the Great Loop and has cruised many parts of the world. Sass went out with the crew of *Kingfisher* during this year's White Marlin Open for the "Like Brothers" feature in this issue.



Tom Spencer is an up-and-coming sportfishing photographer whose creative eye has gotten him invited to a number of premier East Coast tournaments, including the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament in his hometown of Morehead City, North Carolina. "I'm just having a damn ton of fun," says Spencer, founder of Fish Hunt Photo.

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ART, LITERATURE AND FISH



Anglers Journal is an outstanding publication because of its unique mix of fishing, adventure, travel, art and literature. I look forward to the art of Russell Chatham, James Prosek, Guy Harvey and the many photographers selected for the journal. As a photographer of nature and the maritime world (see photo left), a fisherman and a reader, I have enjoyed the books and paintings of Chatham and Prosek for years. To view their work along with the writings of Bill Sisson and the talented, eclectic group of writers he brings to the publication is a treat.

I enjoy talking about the articles on blues, stripers, tuna and bonefish with my fly fisherman son, who has fished from Easter Island to Mexico to Yellowstone, the Firehole and Roaring Fork. Continue the great work. I hope *Anglers Journal* is around for a long time.

Mark Cohen
Osprey, Florida

FLYING KITES

Read Jan Fogt's article on the Rybovich boy, Michael ["Functional Luxury," Winter 2015]. I did a fair amount of fishing in Palm Beach, which included fishing with his Uncle John. I won the West Palm Beach Sailfish Derby in 1970. Here is my point: I never, ever saw anybody fish four kites at one time. Two is a test. This past January to April, I was often offshore between Palm Beach Inlet and Jupiter, and only occasionally did I see two kites, and that was kite season. So my question: Have you ever seen a boat fish four kites?

Ercle F. Herbert Jr.
Onancock, Virginia

Fishing with one kite, let alone more, is no easy task. It was 20 years between the time Bob Lewis built the first commercial kites in the 1960s and Miami captain John Dudas perfected the art of fishing two kites. Dudas' system of adding split-shot weights along the bottom edge of the kite stabilized and separated the erratic devices — a fishing technique he introduced to Palm Beach anglers in the 1980s.

To answer your question about fishing four kites, to our knowledge no one has fished four. However, many captains, including Dudas' son John Louis Dudas, fish three. John Louis routinely fishes three kites for tuna and king mackerel and other species in Miami tournaments from an open 45-foot outboard. Laying the boat beam-to and drifting with the current,



ROBERT HOLLAND

he fishes one kite from the stern, one amidships and one off the bow. Would he fish three or more for sailfish? No, not because it's impossible, as much as tournament rules limit the number of rods, he says. John Louis, like Larry Wilson (who is quoted in the story), believes four is doable on the 64-foot Rybovich walkaround Lizzy Bee (pictured above).

"We've only fished two kites so far because we haven't had more than two fishermen aboard at one time," says Wilson. "With calm weather, I don't see a problem [fishing more] because our GPS-directed IPS pod drives hold the boat's position. The way this boat stays abeam of the wind, it's like fishing from a boat with 64 feet of beam."

With dual rocket launchers in the stern and bow, and rod holders amidships, Wilson sees little problem fishing three and perhaps four kites in the right wind conditions and with ample crew and anglers.

— Jan Fogt

BIGEYE FEVER



I just got my Spring issue of *Anglers Journal* and can't wait to read it cover to cover. Great article on bigeye tuna ["Bigeye, Tuna with an Attitude"]. It really captures bigeye fever, as do the wonderful shots of Nick Mayer's painting. Congrats again on a stunning magazine. It is so gorgeous I don't even want to bend the pages. That's why I got a second copy!

Mark Freedman
Jericho, New York

Anglers Journal

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— Zane Grey,
Tales of Fishes (1919)

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First Light

By Reed Austin

Illustrations by Katey Morrill

Hooked

LIFE, LOVE AND FISHING COME FULL CIRCLE ON A DARK NANTUCKET BEACH



It's nearly midnight in late October on a remote Nantucket beach many moons ago, the first night of our fledgling publishing company's first-ever company outing — a surf-fishing trip. Three of us have four-wheel-drive vehicles and, we hope, enough gear for everyone to survive the learning curve on these island beaches.

This first night proves a mixed blessing. As my group works its way down the beach with the tide, I cast near the Jeep and periodically drive down (with lights out) to scoop up stragglers, straighten out snarls, replace snapped-off lures and then redeploy.

At some point, a careless colleague inexplicably leaves a large wooden bass plug on the driver's seat — a 3-ounce Stan Gibbs swimmer, the famous "bottle plug," brimming with three sets of 4/0 treble hooks. Getting behind the wheel in the dark, weighed down by sweat-heavy layers of wool, waders and foul-weather gear, I splash down like a space shuttle's jettisoned solid-fuel booster rocket, derriere-

first directly on that damn lure. Houston, we have a problem.

Regrettably, we hadn't yet learned to mash down barbs or replace trebles with barbless singles, as we do now. The Mustads are driven hard and deep into the upholstery and pierce my waders, pants and posterior well past the point of no return, effectively stapling my seat to the Jeep's seat in what could charitably be described as a state of advanced discomfort.

At that moment, a shadow looms. Oh good, help is here, except ... oh no, the shadow is cast by the dazzling assistant art director on whom I secretly have a scorching crush, and the fumbling that follows is not at all what I might have fancied under more favorable circumstances. She finally frees my fanny from the front seat, but no amount of oh-so-delicate twisting or tugging will back the barbs out of my bottom. Ultimately, the girl of my dreams bends me over, hoists a heel up onto the non-harpooned half of my heinie, takes hold of the hooks with a pair of big red-handled Manleys and yanks for all she is worth, which

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First Light

proves to be technically effective but definitely not the way I had envisioned our first encounter.

Following a day littered with predictably bad jokes about bottom fishing, the next night's foray rolls out somewhat better. A westerly tide is roaring hard down the south-facing beach at Madequecham. Well after midnight under a platinum moon, I beach a lovely 15-pound striper, our group's first fish of the trip and destined to be the guest of honor at the next evening's dinner.

Back at the Jeep I bump into the dazzling assistant art director, who has been watching from the tailgate with a smile that can be seen from outer space. Sensing an opening and aching for a break, I reach over to steal a kiss and ... she kisses me back. Things improve from there.

On this evening tonight, we're back at Madequecham. I'm leaning against the Cherokee's hood, swapping a skinny sand-eel fly for an olive Mushy the size of a small dish towel and beefing up the tippet to 20-pound fluoro. This late in the season, sunset lures the big girls into the suds, a broth that Yogi Berra might describe as half air, half sand, half water.

The dazzling assistant art director is back at the house, enjoying some quiet time before thinking about dinner. Our three 20-something children are in their waders and out in the surf, working it over for all they're worth. They've fished these beaches their entire lives and know their stuff.


Our son slugs his way out onto a bit of point where whitewater washes up around his waist. This is open ocean and you have to be careful, but he's in shape and on fire, swinging for the fence. In camo waders and red bandana, he looks like Rambo coming ashore.



Both of our daughters have brought their significant others on this annual trip for the first time, and the older daughter's sweetheart — a rookie — outfished her today six-to-one. Was she ever pissed. (The rest of us cheered, of course.) The pairs fish their way down the beach into a vermillion sunset, their casts forming a syncopated backbeat to the greater game of catch playing out along the water's edge.

And then the realization clobbers me. I am standing literally feet from where I kissed my wife for the first time, 30 years earlier almost to the day, and for this fleeting moment, staring into the time capsule that is our kids catching their own kisses on that same stretch of sand, on the same date, at the same ages, and wondering, you know, if 30 years from now ...

And there's a disruption in my time-space continuum, and the moment morphs into a Möbius strip. A hook digs in again, only this time a little farther up, behind the ribs. As pink fades to copper, I mangle a perfectly good Homer Rhode loop knot, no doubt due to darkness.

You can't go out and find hooks like these on purpose. The best you can hope for is that one of them finds you.  *To Gogo, for everything.*

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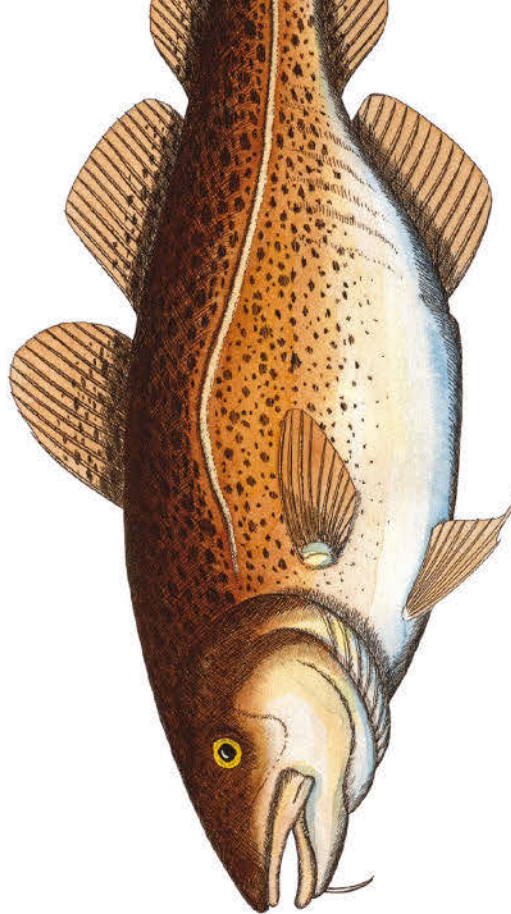
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First Light

By Bill Holm

Painting by Charles Harden



First Fishing

We watch the video of blonde Sigrún
three years old in pink boots
fishing in the fjord with her *Afi*.

She flashes a gap-toothed grin
while reeling in a wriggling codfish
with a little help from beaming *Afi*.

The fish is half her size.

Soon she will eat part of it
in order to grow old and wrinkled
and, with luck, half-remember
the pleasure of catching something
wet and slick and still alive
surrounded by those who adore you
just for being alive yourself.

"First Fishing" from The Chain Letter of the Soul by Bill Holm
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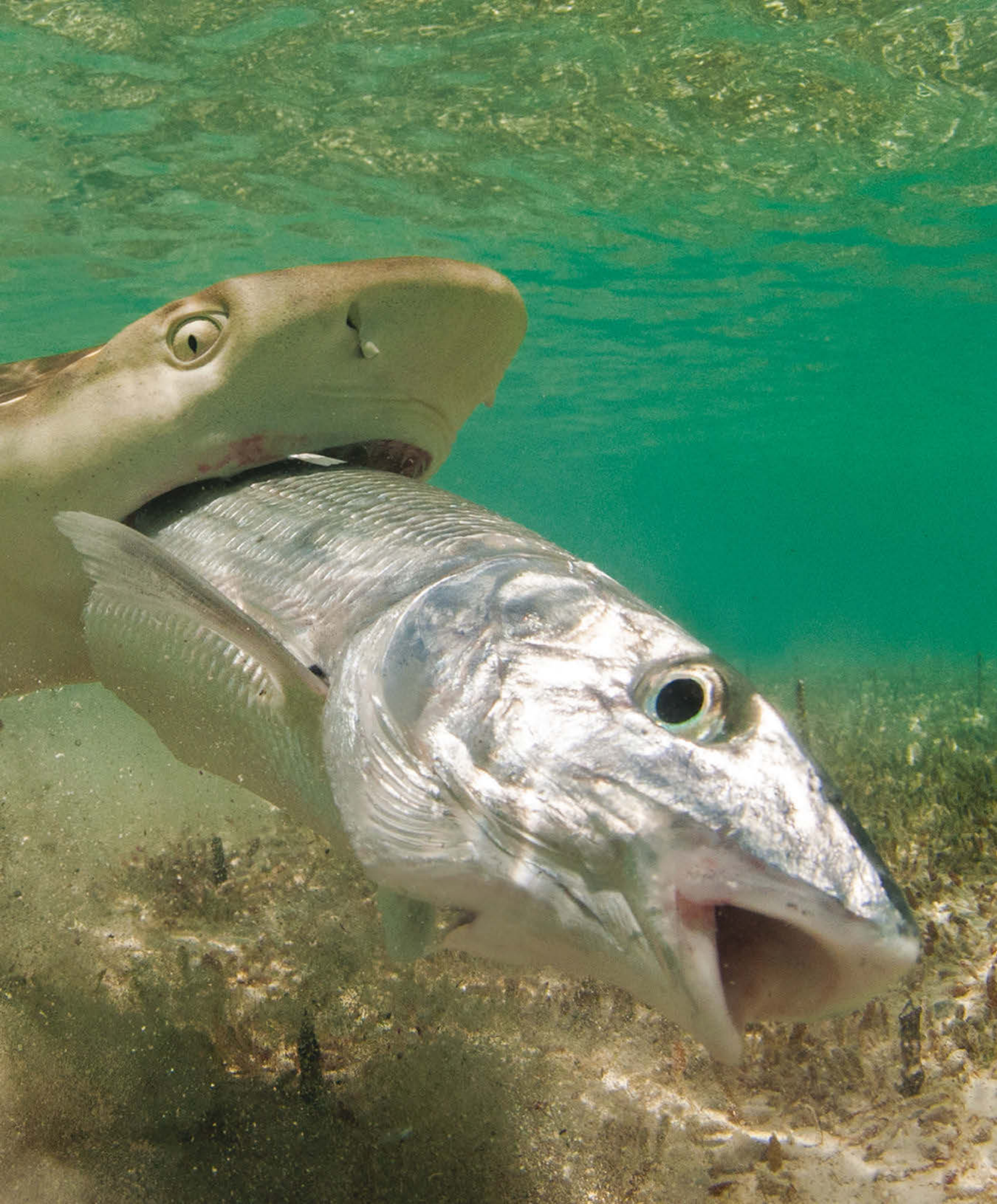
First Light

By Jay Fleming



How I Got That Shot

I was kayaking around the Brigantine Cays in the Exumas when I came upon a tightly packed school of 75 to 100 bonefish that had been corralled by 3- to 5-foot lemon sharks. I grabbed my rod and quickly hooked and released a 5-pound bonefish. The stressed-out fish didn't swim far before a shark charged it, and both began swimming toward me. I threw my rod in the water, grabbed my underwater camera off a back strap and submerged it. I snapped off 12 shots as the shark devoured half of the bonefish in 15 seconds, spooked and ran. Reviewing my images, I saw that the shark had a fine meal, and I had a unique photo. 🐟







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The right ingredients for fall fishing: a rocky point, breaking surf, overcast skies.



A full-page photograph of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, a rocky shore is partially submerged, with waves washing over it. The water is a mix of green and white foam. In the middle ground, several dark rocks protrude from the sea, with waves crashing against them, creating white spray. The background shows a vast expanse of the ocean meeting a sky filled with heavy, grey clouds. The overall mood is dramatic and powerful.

THE CHANCE FOR A GREAT FISH LURES SURFCASTERS INTO THIS SEASON OF CHANGE BY DAVE ANDERSON

The Fall Run



I had made it in time, but I was pouring sweat. The hike in is long enough without additional complexity. It's a big-time ballbuster when you get to the parking spot late and have to power-walk two miles of rugged terrain, a shifting load of gear on your back, before you can so much as see water. The moon was full — October full — good for the walk but not my favorite time to fish the shallows.

There is a constant worry living in the mind of every surfcaster: Might one of the nights I choose to stay home be the night ... or will I land in the wrong spot on the right night?

Mercifully, the other factors — the remaining pieces of the conditions puzzle — had aligned nicely: a light southeast breeze, a big tide and little to no wave action. The air was cool enough that I could see moonlit steam rising off the arms of my wetsuit; in the course of checking my knots and choosing a plug, my sweat had taken on the chill of the night air. I wished I'd brought a jacket.

Fall is a season of constant change. It sneaks up. Summer bleeds into autumn almost imperceptibly, and then, as the leaves begin to turn, someone smashes the hourglass. In an instant there isn't an hour in 24 that you can't come up with a reason you shouldn't be out there. A buzz hangs in the air as in a playoff game; the collective consciousness on shore seems to connect thousands of minds with the crackling speed and power of lightning. And just as you can feel that conductive charge of airborne anticipation when it's ripe, when it's on, you can also feel when the wires go quiet. The sound of crashing waves is almost foreign when there is no chance of a hookup. It's the memories of great fish that keep me out there, but it's remembering the sound of that cold, lonely ocean that pushes me out the door on the cold nights or after five consecutive skunks. No excuse can hold up to missing out.

I snapped on a Beachmaster "Wadd" Needlefish — an obscenely large plug born in the 1980s and named, for reasons obvious, after a porn star, Johnny Wadd. I chose chartreuse because it is one of the few colors that can stand up to the silver light of a clear

full moon. Stepping into the water, I felt relieved that the tide had not yet begun to stir, and I was further relieved to find that the water was warmer than the air, bringing on an unwholesome comfort like the one you feel when you've just jumped directly from a hot tub into a snowdrift.

My first cast flew straight across the barely moving current, and I watched its splash disrupt the undulating white reflection of the rising Hunter's Moon as I began the painfully slow retrieve. Reeling in straight and slow requires consistent presence of mind, lest my cranking hand accelerate as it invariably does on "autopilot," the big plug whizzing through the quickening tide unnoticed.

My mind was unconsciously running through the 20 other places I would no doubt have been better off standing. This doubt is the scourge of autumn surfcasters, who play the night tides on foot. When you've walked two miles to meet a tide, you're committed. Knowing that in no way diminishes the torture of waiting for contact — some sign, any sign of fish to silence the voices of dissent in a caster's skull. *I could have swum out to that rock at the edge of the steep dropoff*, I thought, reasoning that sometimes fish are more cooperative in deeper water on the full moon.

I finished a cast, swung the big needle up to my hand and gingerly cleared a few pieces of brown weed from the rear treble. I braced my feet, swung the plug back on a long lead and cast again. *Or*, the infernal voice chimed in again, *I could have picked any one of a dozen other spots that aren't two miles from the car*, allowing contingency planning if I came up empty. I scolded myself for letting the doubt in. *C'mon Dave*, I muttered. *The fish will be here.*

I'd made five more casts before I felt the first tentative pull of the dropping tide carrying my plug off to my right and forcing me to widen my stance. As the current gained steam, I aimed my casts farther up-tide to take full advantage of the surging water, which draws big stripers in from offshore to feed where it wraps around the point, the moving tide carrying a nightly variety of food.

Frequent soakings are part of the game for those who fish from the autumn surf, but a nice fish makes it all worthwhile.



EARL EVANS (LEFT); JIM LEVISON (RIGHT)





Twenty minutes. That brief span of time and tide would tell me everything I needed to know about the quality of the night's hunches. I fired another cast to my 10 o'clock, well up-tide, and ran through the variables. That morning, same tide, more or less, I'd watched a dense knot of black-backed gulls working on some larger bait — mullet maybe? — within a half-mile of my immediate position. If the traditional pattern held, I suspected this shot of bait had probably, under cover of full dark, slipped up onto the shallow flat with the advancing tide, seeking temporary refuge from predators gathered in the air and the deeper water out front. As I checked the boxes on a mental list of conditions, I was still questioning my instincts — the changing season, the possibility I'd landed in the wrong place on the right night weighed heavily. And now, with that same flat dumping its turbid contents across the gravel bar on which my feet were planted, I'd face my reckoning.

I reeled up and swapped out the needlefish for a 7-inch "glidebait," a mutant plug I'd turned out the winter before, incorporating design

elements borrowed from monster-musky hunters in the Midwest and Canada. With careful guidance, the plug can be steered through the tide slowly with a lazy to-and-fro cadence; in situations that call for some commotion, I can get it swimming in a wonky, spastic, zigzagging motion — a pretty fair imitation of a large baitfish fleeing certain doom in the form of a 40-pound bass on its tail.

It borders on absurd, but because the migration is in a constant state of change, there are no patterns that last more than a tide or three, and with the woodstove and snow shovel beckoning from the not-so-distant future, the urge to go and go and go strains all other aspects of life. You can only tell your boss you "didn't sleep well" so many times before he starts to wonder if there's something more sinister hiding in the dark silence of your nights "at home."

I let the big wood fly and felt it splash down a good distance up-tide. Looking out over the moonlit water for visual confirmation, I spotted the bulging V-wake as the plug pulsed through the series of



It's angler against the elements when the easterlies batter the shore.

seams formed by the longshore current backing up against the land. I followed its progress as it swung from the visible rip lines into the slick, soft water where I stood. When it was two rod lengths away, the water behind the plug exploded as a large and not totally convinced striper turned away at the last second. In that instant, all of the doubt, worry and wonder was driven out by the white noise of adrenaline-fueled concentration. Suppressing the reflex to jump or stop reeling (an unnatural response I've drilled into my synapses over 20 years of surfcasting), I continued to work the plug until it was so close I could have picked it up. No takers.

All of the brain clutter and the cold stiffness in my arms and back dissipated with the ripples from the explosion at my feet. The warmth of excitement spread through my body as I prepared to make my first fully focused cast of the night. In these moments, I think I can understand the "zone" I've heard pitchers describe after throwing a no-hitter; suddenly, every sense heightened to perfect

sharpness, I am standing wholly in the present. The retrieve is effortless, the strike imminent.

As the glider swung past me with the tide, I heard the boil of a take before I felt or saw it. Steadying in that split second, I felt for weight, and as the line came tight, I struck back. Fifty or so yards out I saw the bursts of white as a large bass bucked through the shallows, beelining for deeper water. I leaned into the rod and listened as my drag tempered her first run. Within 15 seconds I'd succeeded in turning her head, and for a few moments she came back toward me.


She cooperated for another 10 yards before burying her face in the gravel. I stood her up with my rod as she thrashed the surface in explosive protest — the sound of those tail slaps never gets old. She righted herself and took off again. This second run was shorter but no less powerful. When you hook a big fish on a big moon, the event becomes hyper-visual; every movement is accentuated as the showering droplets from each splash are touched off by bright moonlight.

Her second run slowed, and I could see the subtle curve of her back breaking the silvery surface as she rested, using her weight to maintain the gap between us. But as I applied more pressure, she yielded, and I began to gain line. When she was 15 feet away, she made one more exhausted lunge, rounding my position against the tide and then ripping out 10 feet of drag before she succumbed. I lifted my rod and she glided, her whole flank exposed, into my outstretched hand. She was big.

When I'd popped the hook out of her jaw hinge, I lipped her with my hand scale: 38 pounds. My hand could barely hold the base of her tail as I guided her broad body back and forth in the shallow surf. The weight and balanced buoyancy of a big striper always strikes me — a body precision-engineered to thrive in even the most inhospitable places. This one had grown through 16 years of adversity.

I moved her back and forth carefully, supporting her midsection with my free hand. She tried to break my grasp. I let go, but she was unstable. I flipped her around and grabbed her jaw, holding her mouth open while the moving tide spilled through her gills. After a minute or so, her dorsal stood, and she made one firm head shake. When she bit me, I knew she was ready. With one soaking smash of her tail she was back on her way. As I turned to check my leader and hooks, I saw something floating by in the current. I stopped it with my rod tip and picked it up. It was an 8-inch herring that could only have been regurgitated during the landing or release. I knew I was in the right place.

Every year when the spring run begins, I feel as if I've been rescued from a frozen hell — no qualms. But when summer gives way to fall, there's a feeling of true conflict. It's almost like watching a child grow: You can't wait for her to take her first steps, talk, hold a rod. But in the same moment you're already wishing that yesterday was tomorrow.

I watched that big striper swim off into the rare calm of the October Atlantic, content in a way I seldom am. There is no time in my life when the minutes slip so quickly through my fingers as they do on November's doorstep. But it's moments like these that stop the clock, just for a second, and remind me that the future is always more exciting than the past — the next tide always comes with promise, and that's what keeps me out there alone in the cold, trying to stare down winter for one more good fish. 





Fast & Furious

THE SWIFT, BREAKNECK LIFE OF THE DOLPHIN,
A FISH THAT LIVES HARD AND DIES YOUNG
BY ARNOLD MARKOWITZ

The dolphin were running small off southeastern Florida last summer. You learned that if you were in the Gulf Stream fishing sargassum weed lines for Mr. Big, but you also could have found out from a police blotter that the catch was not as hot as the weather.

Police blotter? Seriously, here's a sampling of June and July reports from the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's enforcement posse:

"HILLSBORO INLET: two dudes with nine dolphin, four of them short of the 20-inch minimum from chin to tail fork"

"MIAMI: a boat with 12 shorts and 28 fillets"

"FORT LAUDERDALE: two cowboys with 14 dolphin, nine of them short"

"JUPITER: a boat with five shorts in the cooler"

Growth spurt

Do you know how fast dolphin grow? If those shorts were just a few inches under 20, in another week or so they could have been legally long enough.

I found itty-bitty, teeny-weeny ones without getting busted. Less than an inch long, they were swimming in a tank at a laboratory alongside the National Marine Fisheries Service on Virginia Key off Miami. John Stieglitz, a marine biologist from the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science across the causeway, dipped a few into a plastic pitcher. They were as transparent as the water.

"These are 11-day-old mahi," Stieglitz says, using the dolphin's Hawaiian name, "with a red-orange belly. It's full of artemia [brine shrimp], so you can see they've been eating."

The lab is full of tanks containing mahi-mahi at every stage of development, from egg to adult. Stieglitz and his researchers catch brood stock on hook and line, bring them ashore in transport tanks and transfer them to lab tanks, where they are fed and grown.

"They've been in captivity about a month now," Stieglitz says, stopping at a tank. "They were schoolies when they were caught, 2 to 5 pounds. Now they're 8 to 10 pounds. They'll spawn every night. The females will cycle every other day. Then you'll have eggs every day."

"They adapt to captivity fast," he adds. "We catch 'em today, they'll spawn tonight, and they'll eat tomorrow, which is not to say you can put them in your bathtub and do this."

Stieglitz is a fisherman — making the most of his grant-funded



BENJAMIN RUSNAK



Running and gunning: Two South Florida anglers search for birds, weed lines and floating debris, all potential signs of the whereabouts of mahi-mahi.

*That's the ticket. A nice dolphin displays
its finest colors on a day offshore.*





TOM SPENCER

research with that part of his mind — but his first purpose is to study the effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Gulf of Mexico oil calamity on fish that inhabit the spill area, including dolphin/mahi.

Stieglitz fetches a bucket of sardines from a cooler, and we walk outside to another tank. Its population — a bull and three cows — are swimming in circles, hardly at the 50 mph that's said to be their maximum but pretty fast. "These have been in captivity about six months," Stieglitz says. "They're packing about 35, 36 pounds. They pretty much outgrow the tank. They die eventually, or the male will kill off the females — competition for food."

He tosses sardines into the tank, one at a time. The fish don't pose and smile like those other dolphins, the mammals that are on the football helmet. These pick off the sardines without breaking stride. They look as if they're in a hurry. Whether in a lab tank or the Gulf Stream, that is the dolphin's life — speeding, feeding, using up and replenishing energy, always on the run, burning out too soon. In the tank they do everything they do in the ocean, except migrate.

In the wild, a dolphin that isn't caught and kept by one of us, or devoured by a wahoo or a blue marlin, is a robust senior citizen at age 3, a faltering geezer at 4-plus. The all-tackle world record, an 87-pounder caught off Costa Rica's Pacific coast, almost certainly didn't make it to 5. Live fast, love hard, die young.

What's in a name?

In Florida, most of us call them dolphin, although mahi is trending. The International Game Fish Association, in an appeasing gesture to bottlenosers, refers to them as dolphinfish. That doesn't look right, a "ph" and an "f" in the same word, but you'd better start there before getting into a fishing conversation in a non-English language.

Run "dolphinfish" through Google's translator, and you'll get *kyinigón* in Greek, *shīra* in Japanese. It's *doirado* in the Galician dialect of Spain and *dorád* in Gaelic. When in Rome, say *lampuga*. In Paris, pardon my French, say *coryphène*. That mimics the scientific name, *coryphaenidae*. The Dutch, Danes and Germans call them gold mackerel.

This document accuses eastern U.S. menu writers of calling dolphin mahi-mahi because it looks exotic, so they can charge the rubes a buck or two more. Don't believe that about customers fearing dolphin are the offspring of Flipper, the bottlenose super-dolphin who performed heroic deeds on black-and-white television when the set had a circular screen like a washing machine. If you remember Flipper only on your good days, they can feed you horsemeat and you won't know the difference.

That Costa Rican all-tackle record 87-pounder was caught Sept. 26, 1976, by a gent named Manuel Salazar on 50-pound line. It was 5 feet, 9.5 inches long, with a girth of 28.7 inches. It bit on a trolled soft plastic squid. The second-biggest in IGFA ranks was caught near Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, on 80-pound line by James Dillon III on July 31, 2001. His lure was a Hawaiian Petrolero.

On June 9, 2007, Florida fisherman Robert Vail caught an 81-pounder trolling a live goggle-eye under a kite near his home in Lantana. He thought he had a world record for 30-pound line, but his line tested closer to 50 and was disqualified. Florida doesn't sweat line tests, so Vail set a state record that still swims.

His fish was taken in water about 200 feet deep — unusually but not amazingly shallow for dolphin. Stieglitz has seen them come to chum lines in 60 feet of green water over near-shore reefs. Miami charter captain Jimbo Thomas says make that 30 feet.

Don't look for them there. Usually dolphin chasers find them near the surface of blue water over bottom about 1,000 feet or deeper; 1,000 feet isn't far offshore for southeast Florida, where foot-propulsion kayakers can reach the Gulf Stream.

Running and gunning

Come fishing with us now. We're aboard *Bottom Line*, a diesel-powered 34-foot Sea Vee owned by Miamian Mario Castillo. Our other partners are George Googas and Dean Waite. They all fish offshore more and know more about it than I do. Their catching skills are better, too, but as for the basics we are equals because, honestly, it's almost entirely about finding those things. How to go do that is no insider's secret.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- ▶ Weed lines of sargassum: Wide and thick or patchy and sparse, it probably has lots of small forage taking shelter in and under.
- ▶ Birds: Better a flock than a single but take what you can get. If they're swooping, diving or both, investigate.
- ▶ Floating debris: Nothing beats flotsam. A freight pallet is a dolphin magnet. In Hawaii, mahi hunters bundle bamboo into mats, drop them onto the water and stand by for action. In the Dominican Republic they do that with palm thatch.
- ▶ Flying fish: National Geographic says their top swimming speed is 37 mph, not fast enough to escape dolphin. If they're gliding above the surface, something's probably after them. If they're jumping and birds are diving on them, something's caught them from below. Dolphin, we hope.

On *Bottom Line*, we're running and gunning, meaning that we're moving along some quick, looking for any or all of the above. We find a lot of weed lines and troll their fringes without results. We see little stuff — almaco jacks and some blue runners. We chase flying fish, hooking nothing in their draft. We see no flotsam. We cruise as far as 17 miles offshore, water as deep as 2,200 feet. Most birds we see — not a lot — are doing the same as we are with the same results.

About 10 a.m. on 1,120 feet of water, we see a bird, probably a tern. It acts excited. George puts two flat lines trolling off the stern on ambitious 30-pound conventional rigs. On the port side near the end of our wake skips a chrome-headed blue and white-skirted lure meant to imitate a flying fish.

"Something's chasing the flyers," Mario says, goosing the throttle a bit. The port-side rig replies, "zzzzzzzzzz!" The fish doesn't leap, as a dolphin should, likely because it's overmatched by the tackle. It's a cow dolphin, slightly longer than the 20-inch minimum. As George cranks it up, another rule-break joins the no-jump infraction: There's no school of *aranymakrélát* (Hungarian) fluttering around. If there were, George would hold the cow in the water so the rest would stay, and we'd all cast lighter baits on spinning tackle. Alone, the fish swims toward the bow, where Mario grabs the leader and drops her into the fishbox. Flip, flap, flop she goes.

That's our only dolphin. We haven't done a thing wrong, but we should've been there yesterday. "Those fish are traveling. They're not hanging around. The last four or five days, they were killing 'em off Miami," Mario says.

"I've always caught more dolphin down here than off Hillsboro," says Dean. "The bait's more prevalent or something, except last week."

Weed line action

On Sunday of that week, Dean and I, along with his neighbor Christophe Rouille and Chris' dad, Jacques, fish on Dean's boat, *First Light*. Hillsboro is the inlet near his home. Less than an hour from port, about eight miles offshore, Chris spots the first weed line and




BENJAMIN RUSNAK



Miamians Mario Castillo (left) and partner George Googas focus on the hunt.





Dolphin live fast, love hard and die young, even when they don't wind up in a fishbox. They have a life span of about 4 to 5 years.

gets so excited that he splits his close-fitting shirt. We hurry our baits out — halves of cut balao hooked on 20-pound spinning gear — and hook up immediately. In the next hour and a half, we cover five miles east to west and find *delfink* (Slovenian) on every patch of sargassum.

This is why we fish for these things: the spectacle of dolphin (Floridish) leaping, twisting, gleaming, splashing down and leaping again. It's almost like watching *Dancing with the Stars*. You want to get up and try those moves yourself. Or Olympic figure skating, except that skaters are gigged for coming down headfirst. We're too busy catching and cooling fish to count, much less weigh and measure them other than by eyeball. We bring aboard 18 *korifena* (Bulgarian), the smallest of them 2 or 3 inches over the minimum and the biggest (my guess) a 12-pound bull caught by Chris. If I'd caught it, I'd guess 15 pounds.

Dean calls the lines in at 9:28 a.m., good timing. We feel as if we've been fishing all day. Back at Dean's dock, it will take longer to fillet our *skumbres* (Lithuanian) than the hour and a half it took to catch them.

Fish talk

I collected some dolphin tips from Jimbo Thomas, co-captain with his brother Rick of the Miami charter boat *Thomas Flyer*:

WHEN YOU'RE CHASING SCHOOLIES, the small ones are typically going north with the Gulf Stream, and the larger ones are going south. Maybe the smaller ones are trying to conserve energy by not swimming into the current. I use the compass in my binoculars to watch the birds while they're trying to catch up to the fish so I can see when the fish turn. If they're going south, we're pretty certain they're larger fish.


WHEN BIRDS ARE SITTING ON THE WATER, usually there are not going to be dolphin there. I think if they've got their little feet paddling around, the dolphin are going to bite them.

WHEN YOU FIND SOMETHING FLOATING, there's bait underneath it. Even if there aren't any dolphin, drop your sabiki rig down and catch those baits and put them in your well because that's what they're eating. They'll eat anything, but if you match the hatch, it's that much better.

WHEN THEY WON'T BITE, they're still feeding — on little teeny minnows, little blue runners, little rainbow runners and others in the grass. And we're throwing big pilchards and herring, but that's not what they're eating. Use your smallest baits. You can also cut little strips of bonito and jiggle them.

YOU CAN'T CATCH FLYING FISH, but you can still use them for bait. Cut a dolphin's belly open. Maybe they just ate a flying fish 10 minutes ago and it's still in good shape.

Long ago I caught a big dolphin that leapt and came down in my 17-foot center console and kept on jumping, knocking everything around. The wrasslin' match that followed left me and the boat wearing as many scales as the fish. Most people don't believe the story. Jimbo and Rick do.

"We're at the Miami sea buoy catching bait, and here comes a dolphin greyhounding straight at our boat," says Jimbo. "He's gonna jump in the friggin' boat! As he gets closer we see a big barracuda chasing him, and he jumps smack into the back of the boat. And he was stunned and the barracuda took him. If he was a foot higher he'd have landed in the boat." 

TOM SPENCER

Salts



"I need a 12-step program to get out of this nonsense. That's the truth . . . But it's a pretty good way to make a living. There's still a good community down here."

— DAVE DAILEY, 46,
longtime mate and deckhand

FISH HEADS

THE WORK IS HARD AND YOU WON'T GET RICH, BUT
THESE CAPTAINS AND MATES ARE ON THE OCEAN FOR LIFE
BY WILLIAM SISSON PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CEVOLI

We approached the charter boat just as the customers were saying their goodbyes to the captain and mate and dragging their coolers to their trucks. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and the temperature was in the low 90s.

"We're hot, we're grouchy, and we really don't want to talk," warned the mate as we introduced ourselves. We shook hands anyway and stood on the finger pier, baking in the July sun for an awkward moment or two before we were finally invited aboard.

This was the third time in five weeks that photographer Michael Cevoli and I had prowled the fishing docks in the port of Galilee, Rhode Island, putting together this photo essay on captains and mates. By now, we had gotten used to the blunt honesty of the men running the charter and party boats out of this rough-hewn fish town. Behind the requisite gruffness, most of these hard-working souls were generous with their time and stories, despite having already logged 10 or more hours on the job with more waiting before they could finally close their eyes on the day.

Our goal was to capture a cross-section of the fishermen after they'd spent a long day in the saddle — hot and bothered, sweaty and unvarnished, satisfied or ill-tempered, the mood usually hinging on whether the fish, weather, customers, equipment and lord knows what else happened to be cooperating

that day. Like most of us, they typically were in a better mood when they were catching well than on slow days.

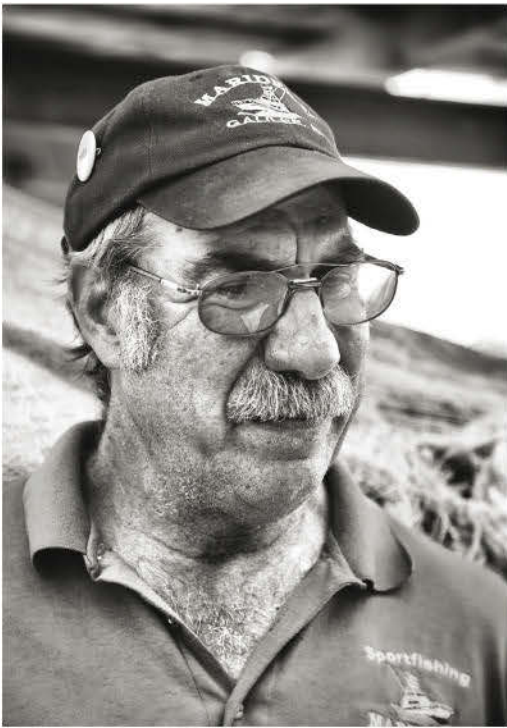
We were looking for honest faces and unfiltered talk — portraits of the crusty, the cantankerous, the authentic. Young and old. Wized and foolish. Ocean poet and monosyllabic deckhand. You can read a lot in a man's face. Lot of miles, fish, weather — and more.

I interviewed them in their cockpits, wheelhouses and on the docks, wherever we could find a little shade, scribbling notes about their fishing lives, their jobs, their boats, their children, the changes they've seen, their dreams and frustrations. As we settled into conversation, the men opened up, and Cevoli burned through digital memory cards.

"I love shooting this way," says Cevoli, 33, a documentary photographer from Bristol, Rhode Island, whose subjects have ranged from Pennsylvania coal miners and bikers to New England commercial fishermen and tugboat crews. "They're interacting with the writer rather than the camera, which makes them more relaxed. You can get strong pictures. The photos are honest. Raw."

We both like proud, feisty underdogs, or what Cevoli calls "low-brow outsider culture." You certainly can find plenty of that burly, independent spirit here in Point Judith, the section of Narragansett that encompasses Galilee and which the fishermen simply refer to as the "Point."

What came through clearly after more than a



"Still here. Still doing it. Still enjoying it. It's a disease. You have to love it. You'll never get rich, but I still enjoy it. If you don't, you'll go nuts."

— CAPT. ANDY DANGELO, 63, *Maridee II*



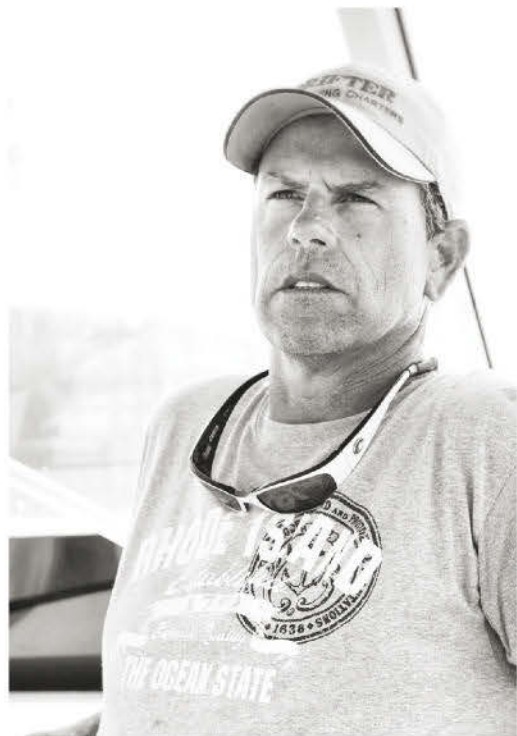
"Smoke like a chimney, drink a lot of coffee. I just love fishing. When I get burned out, I'll just walk away. I still get a kick out of watching people catch fish and watching new mates come on board."

— CAPT. RUSS BENN, 65, *Jeanie B and Seven B's*



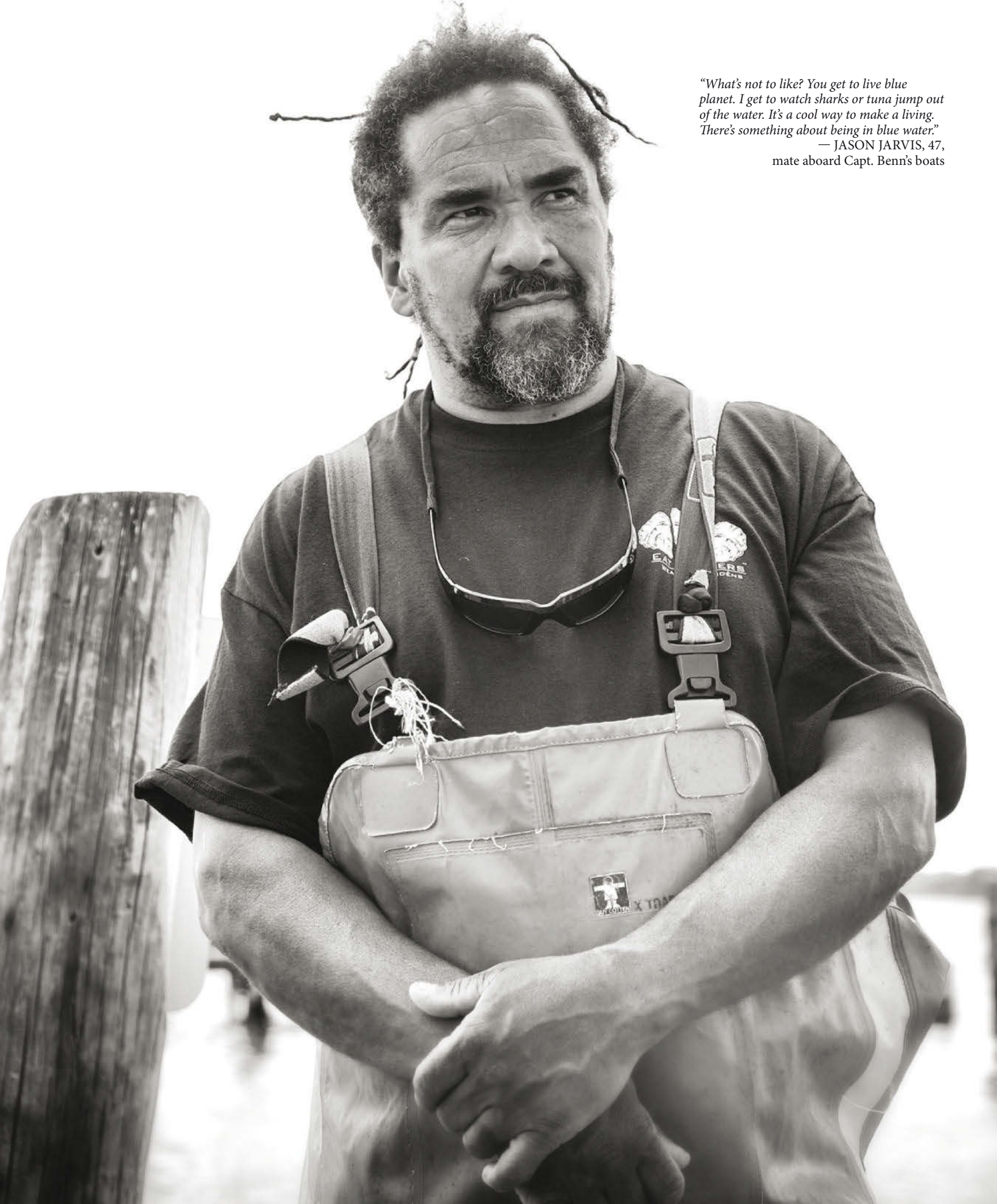
"I'm part of a dying breed. ... I can't stand the Internet. I'd like to throw it out the window. There's no more word of mouth. Now it's who's got the prettiest boat, the fastest boat."

— CAPT. ANDY AMBROSIA, 73, *Misty*



"Anybody in this industry who is getting anywhere is working his ass off. Hard work will prevail. I do everything. I'm the mechanic, the plumber, the fiberglass man, the mate. ... I go home each day knowing I've done an honest day's work."

— CAPT. RICHARD CHATOWSKY, 48, *Drifter*



"What's not to like? You get to live blue planet. I get to watch sharks or tuna jump out of the water. It's a cool way to make a living. There's something about being in blue water."

— JASON JARVIS, 47,
mate aboard Capt. Benn's boats



*"I belong on the water. Some days are hard.
Some aren't. It's unpredictable. But I love
being on the water."*

— STEPHEN MENARD, 43,
Sakonnet Point trap fisherman



"It's a long day, and you really bake in the sun. But I like it. You're outside."

— MATT CAUCHON, 19,
summer mate and college sophomore



"My boys don't want any part of the fishing business. They see what's happening. The season is getting too short, the regulations are getting too tough, and the part-timers are hurting the business."

— CAPT. MARK AMBROSIA, 45, *Misty*



"I like being outside. Being in my little spot. Being in control of everything I can and letting Mother Nature do the rest."

— AJ DANGELO, 26, mates aboard *Maridee II* in summer and teaches high school physics and chemistry



"I like catching stripers on my snakes [tubes]. I just love it when they hit. They tear out line. I love the challenge of putting people on fish, especially if they haven't done it before."

— CAPT. KELLY SMITH, 55, *C-Devil II*



"I don't think I could find a better job. It's hard work, but it's also fun. Fishing is one of my biggest passions. It's a long day but the stuff I learned here is so unbelievable."

— PETER "GIB" RANDALL 18,
a high school senior, summer mate

dozen interviews was this: With each passing year, the day-to-day job of these fishermen becomes increasingly difficult and the future less predictable due to rules and regulations, rising costs, uncertainty over fish stocks and other factors.

Despite the frustrations and the pessimistic writing on the wall, they profess that there is nothing they'd rather do than be on the water and fishing. That is the paradox. "I've seen the best, and I'm starting to see the worst," says Capt. Andy Dangelo, 63, who runs the 36-foot *Maridee II* and has been fishing all his life. "If they can keep the politics out of fisheries management, things would be a lot better. Everything is such a battle these days."

Despite the challenges, Dangelo, who holds a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology and an associate's in marine technology, says he wouldn't trade his job for another. "I like to watch people catch fish, and I like finding fish, too," says Dangelo, who holds the state record for a 718-pound mako. "It's a disease. You have to love it. You'll never get rich, but I still enjoy it. If you don't, you'll go nuts."

Longtime captain Russ Benn echoes those sentiments. "I still get a kick out of watching people catch fish and watching new mates come on board," says Benn, 65, who has been fishing for 47 years and runs

the 36-foot charter boat *Jeanie B* and 80-foot party boat *Seven B's V*. "I love what I'm doing. Look out this window," he says, gesturing from the pilot-house of his Harris 36. "This is the view from my office. Until my arms fall off, this is what I'll do."

On most days, Benn is accompanied by Luci-Lou, who is part American bulldog, part beagle and is better known on the docks than some mates. "She's got a better attitude, too," Benn says with a smile.

Benn is a respected captain who's hired more than 100 deckhands during his long tenure in Galilee. He says they become like family. He's watched them grow, mature, marry and start families. He's even had second-generation mates sail with him. "We call them fish heads," he says. "They're either crazy about fishing or they just have to be on the water." (The same, of course, is true of Benn.)

And he's always willing to take a flier on a young person who needs a chance and a job. "Keep them off the drugs. Keep them off the booze," Benn says. "I'll pay them something to keep them off the street."

At 73, Capt. Andy Ambrosia, who's been fishing since the 1950s, is probably the senior-most member of the tribe. "I love it. I really do," says the skipper of the 43-foot, Bolger-designed *Misty*, which he built in 1969. "I'd never want to do anything else."


He, too, acknowledges the challenges that charter fishermen face today, ticking off a list of complaints, from over-regulation to a proliferation of part-time competition. "This port has changed so much in the last 25 years," says Ambrosia, who fishes with son Mark. "It's very hard to make a living. I'm part of a dying breed."

He's not alone.

"I am a living dinosaur," declares Capt. Richard Chatowsky, who runs the 37-foot diesel-powered *Drifter*, which he fishes without a mate. "My wife says I was born 80 years too late."

A full-time second-generation charter captain, Chatowsky also recites a litany of hurdles and changes that make the job not quite what it used to be. But in another breath, he says it's all worthwhile. "I love it. I do," says Chatowsky, 48, who fished summers with his father and took his first giant bluefin at age 14. "Where else are you going to get this kind of freedom? You're your own boss. You make all your own calls. It's unique in its own way."

And if he were to win a million-dollar lottery tomorrow, he says, he might leave the charter business in his wake, but he wouldn't quit fishing. "I'll never leave the ocean," he says.

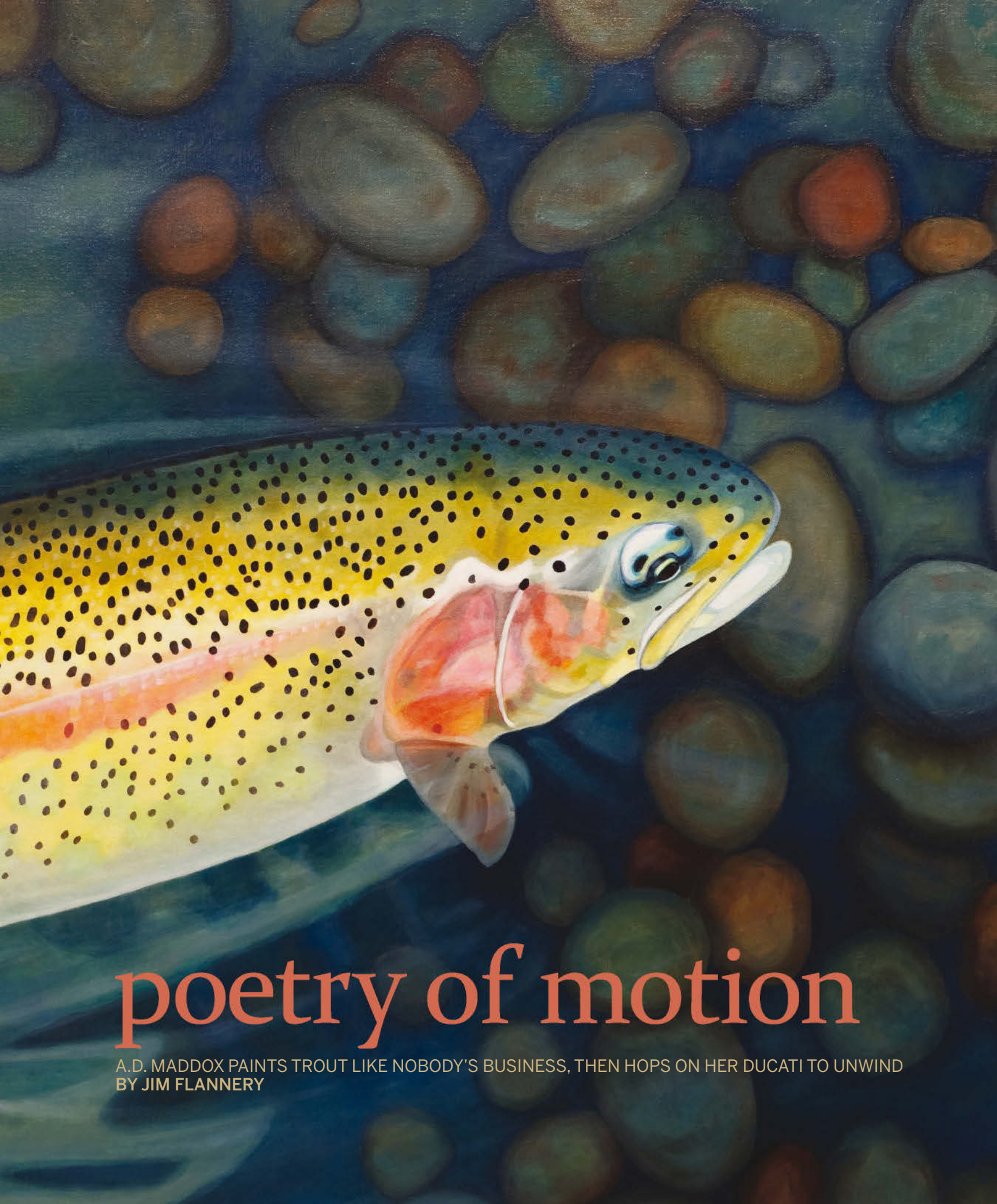
"It takes all kinds to make the Point work," says deck ape Zach Harvey. "We've all been accused of being complainers. But we work hard," says Harvey, 39, a poet of the Point and frequent contributor to *Anglers Journal*. "We're just fish-afflicted." 



"So many rules you need to be a lawyer to go fishing. Rules, regulations, fish abundance. It's definitely not getting better."
— CAPT. RICHARD ROMANO, 67, Seven B's

Thanksgiving





poetry of motion

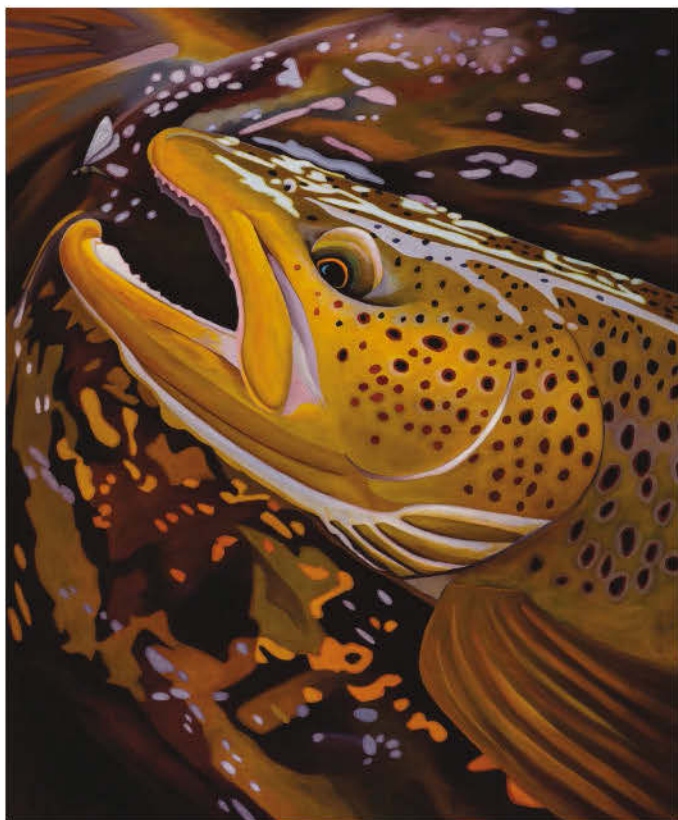
A.D. MADDOX PAINTS TROUT LIKE NOBODY'S BUSINESS, THEN HOPS ON HER DUCATI TO UNWIND
BY JIM FLANNERY

Color of Trout

Her paintings of trout trumpet her passion for color and her love of fly-fishing. A.D. Maddox captures the chameleon-like quality of trout and the water dancing to the rhythms of the fish rising to the fly. She fires up her imagination in creative tension as she moves from the discipline of her Nashville, Tennessee, studio to the adrenaline rush of riding her Ducati motorcycle to the almost spiritual serenity of fly-fishing.

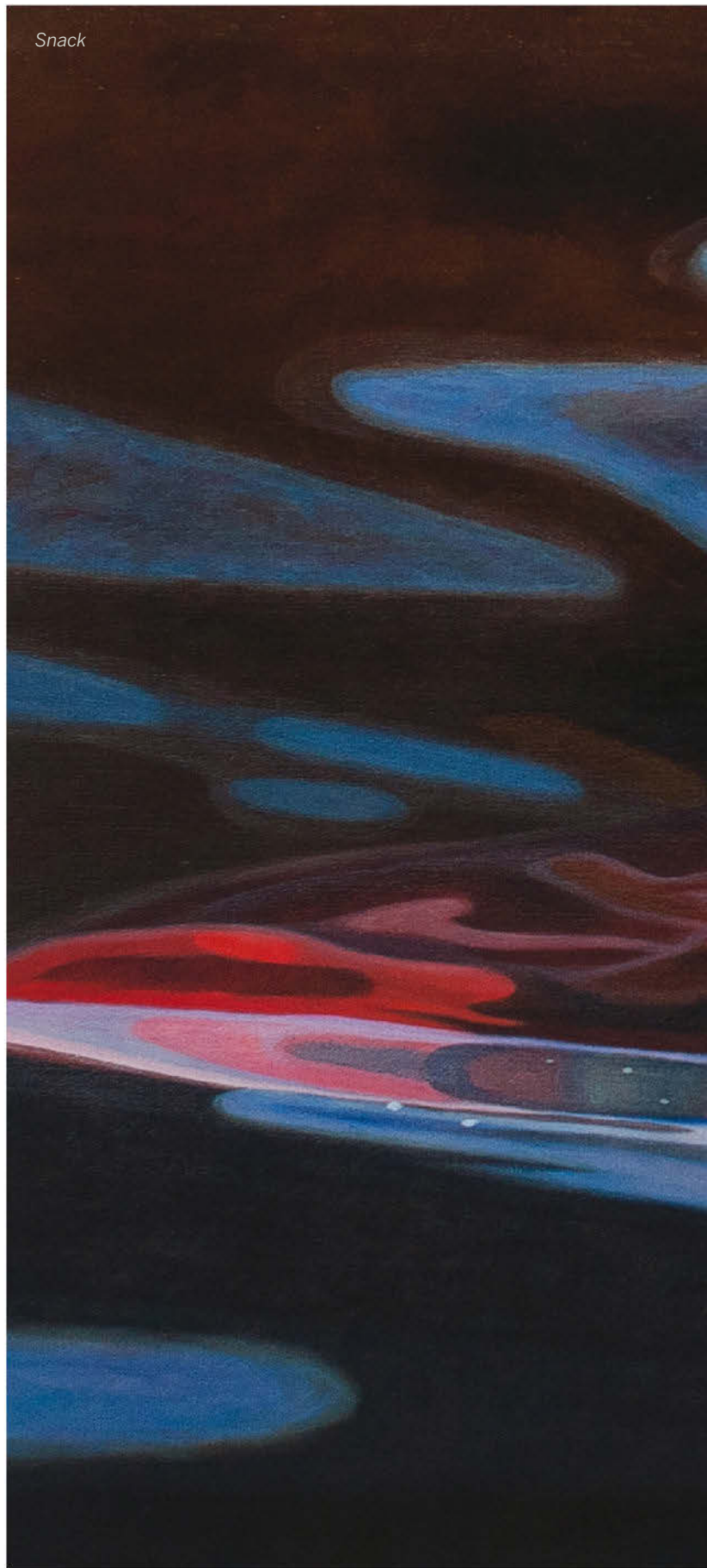
Born in Nashville, Amelia Drane Maddox, 46, grew up in an artistic family and as a youngster already was compiling a sketchbook of birds and animals drawn with colored pencils. Largely self-taught, she took art classes in high school and later worked under the Iranian artist Kamy Deljou. On a trip out West, she started doing cowboy paintings, found a niche painting trout on high-end furniture, then settled into painting trout as fine art, her focus the past 15 years. She also paints flies, trout skins and “bug gut art” — paintings created by capturing insects on a wet canvas mounted on her motorcycle during evening rides.

Maddox paints in oils on Belgian linen. Her work has appeared in *Gray's Sporting Journal* and many fly-fishing publications, as well as *Motorcycle Monthly* and the Patagonia and L.L. Bean catalogs, and on a variety of merchandise — T-shirts, iPhone cases, fly boxes, baseball caps, even a StealthCraft hull (admaddox.com).

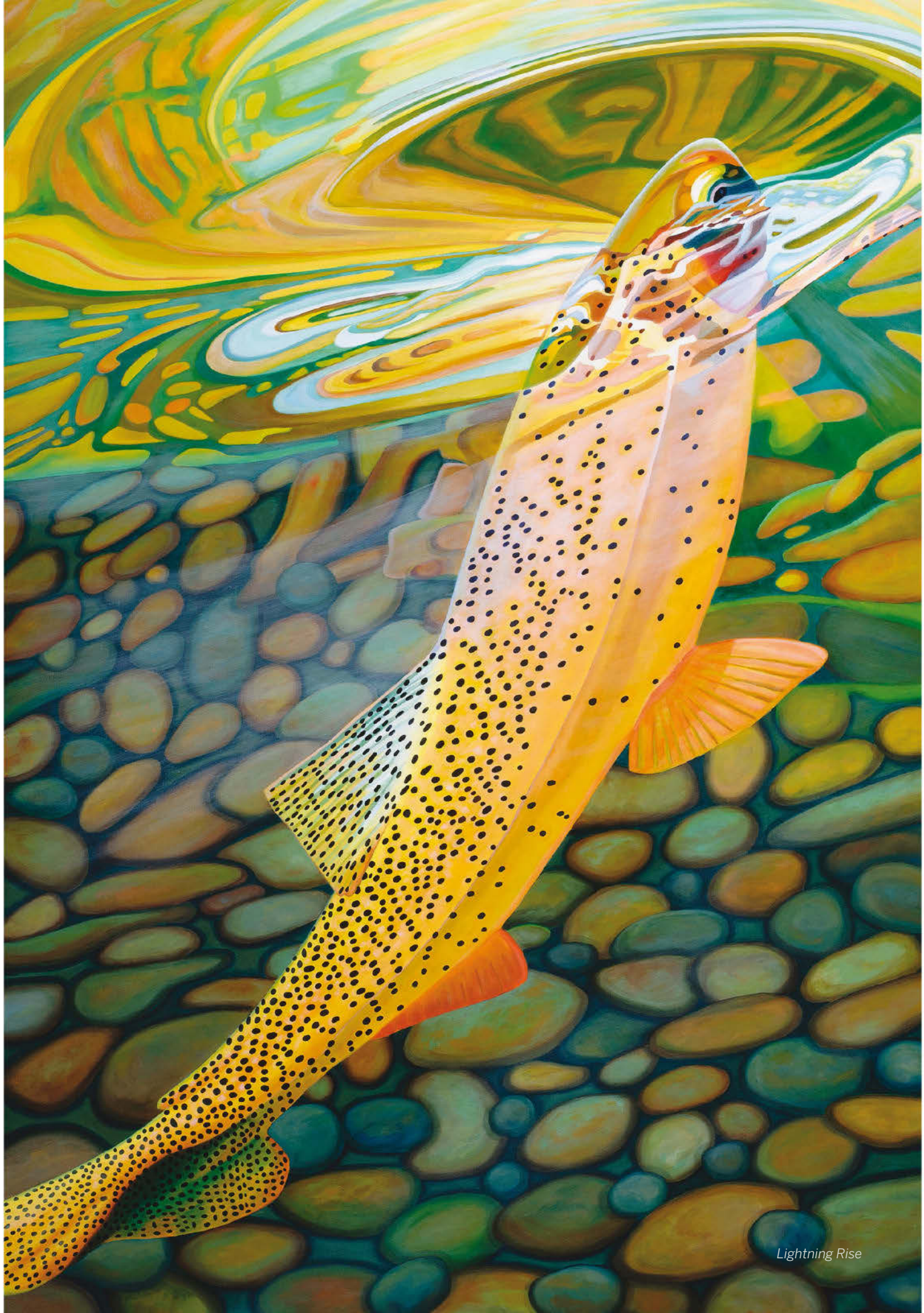


Rise Series #8

Snack







A Conversation With The Artist

MY GRANDMOTHER WAS A PORTRAIT ARTIST,

and my mother worked in acrylics. I started drawing when I was 4 or 5 and knew from early on I was really good. As a tot, I took art classes. By seventh grade I was painting clothes and had a sketchbook of animals and birds I'd drawn with colored pencils. I took art classes in high school — pastels, oils, sketching. I guess one reason I never stopped painting was that I was constantly validated. But I also loved it. I got lost in it, lost in the moment.

I STUDIED SPORTS MEDICINE at the University of Colorado, but that's not where my passion was. I missed the intimate connection to nature that my art gave me, so I set my sights on painting. I went to Atlanta and apprenticed under Kamy Deljou, learning many different mediums. Later I found a niche painting T-shirts, bags, clothing. I learned to paint to an audience. I moved out West and painted canvases of Western art specific to the area. I moved to the emerging art mecca of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and painted landscapes of mountains, aspens, horses, and scenes of cowboys and Indians. I was painting quite a large area of motifs until I discovered trout, and that's where I've stayed. You have to narrow yourself down to one thing and get really good at it.

IT'S A BIT TOUGH GETTING into big galleries when your work is not known. So at 27 I started painting furniture — cabinets, armoires, benches and mirror frames, beautiful works of art. Beth Overcast, owner of Center Street Gallery in Jackson, heard about what I was creating and told me I should try to paint trout on some of the pieces. My first trout piece, a cabinet, sold for \$1,000 in 20 minutes. That's when I decided trout was my bread and butter. In summer 2001, Eldridge French's Sagebrush Gallery in Ketchum, Idaho, gave me my first show of trout on canvas. After that, I just didn't stop.

I DID PLENTY OF BAIT FISHING when I was a kid, but in 2000 my dad taught me to fly-fish on the Yellowstone River so I could learn how to catch these beautiful fish and take photos for painting material. I love to fly-fish, but I'm not a fly fisherman who does art. I'm an artist who fly-fishes.

Yellowstone Cutty





A.D. Maddox: "Color is how I see. The trout I paint are alive with color."

AFTER LEARNING TO FLY-FISH, I took photos of trout. I photographed them from every angle — top, below, side, head on. I would go to a hatchery, feed the fish and photograph them as they came up to eat. Early on, I tried to match my painting to the photos, almost like photo realism. Now I let a painting go where it wants to go. I look. I don't think. I respond. I want what I experience to be on my canvas. I draw the image, then lay down layers and layers of base coats. I put stuff in, take stuff out. I tweak, harmonize and fine-tune colors until I'm satisfied I've got it. I don't know how many ways there are to paint a trout, but I'm finding out.

THE NO. 1 THING THAT DRAWS ME TO TROUT is their color. They are absolutely drop-dead gorgeous.

Color is how I see. Color is life. Color makes me happy. The trout I paint are alive with color.

MOTORCYCLING TO ME IS JUST GETTING OUT and breathing. When you're constantly creating, you have to get out and breathe a little bit. It's fast action, living in the moment. I don't go way too fast anymore — around 100 mph.

I'VE DONE 23 PAINTINGS IN FOUR MONTHS. I'm feeling pretty good about my productivity, so now I want to go and get creative. I want to take more front and side-angle photos of trout coming up to get the fly. I'll be spending time in Florida and plan to do pen-and-ink and colored-pencil drawings, probably of snook. 🐟



Firehole Rise



Rise Series #2

AD MANDOX



Capt. Greg Dubrule (left) sets the tone on the *Black Hawk*, and these Polaroid snapshots capture the fun of a summer's day when the fish are biting like mad and everyone is catching.



Catch 'em Up, Boys

Party-boat fishing is a fast, chaotic and uniquely American experience
By William Sisson Polaroid photos by Sam Dole

Part coach, part floor boss, part cheerleader, Capt. Greg Dubrule patrols the perimeter of the upper deck of the *Black Hawk*, looking down on roughly 65 anglers standing shoulder to shoulder as they bounce 16-ounce sinkers and fresh clam baits along the bottom.

From his elevated position on the 75-foot head boat, Dubrule cajoles, instructs, encourages and sends the occasional good-natured zinger to the bait dunkers below as they swing porgies and black sea bass over the rail and an occasional summer flounder into the net. Here's a sampling of advice the good captain dispensed on one drift: "You can't catch them like that, buddy. You need bait."

And ...

"There you go. You got him. I felt that up here."

And ...

"Be a catcher, not a rod holder."

And ...

"Set the hook and wind, boys. Don't just jerk it. You have to be on that reel instantly. We're here to catch them. Catch 'em up, boys. Catch 'em up. Set the hook and wind."

"Got one, Cap," says a middle-aged fisherman on the starboard bow as he cranks up a porgy. "Now I can go home to my wife."

"Good," Dubrule replies. "Now get 30 more."





"You can't catch them like that, buddy. You need bait."



Hero or bum

Welcome to another day at the office with Capt. Dubrule, his black Lab Flounder and the six mates sailing aboard the 8-year-old *Black Hawk*, which steams daily out of Niantic, Connecticut. Today the twin 750-hp Detroit Diesels rumble to life around 6:58 a.m.; 11 minutes and two short blasts from the boat's horn later, we're leaving the dock for the 24-mile run to Montauk, New York, where the bottom fishing has been very good. It's a longer run than he's had to make in previous years, but with the local grounds being slow, Dubrule steams to where the fishing is best.

A veteran charter skipper with 47 years on southern New England waters, Dubrule is all too familiar with the daily challenge of running a head boat. "We have to make fishermen out of tourists, and we only have a couple of hours to do it," says Dubrule, 65, who for years ran the popular charter boat *Seaweed Too*. "But we'll get there."

And the skipper knows well the yardstick by which his customers will measure him at the end of the day. "We're judged on your ability," says Dubrule, who has done everything from lobstering to offshore fishing. "If you catch, I'm a hero. If you don't, I'm a bum."

But Dubrule has always had a knack for catching, be it giant bluefin tuna, striped bass or the lowly porgy. "I've always said the fishing part of it is easy. The hard part," he adds, "is putting people on the boat."

Americana

Head-boat fishing is a quintessential American experience in which people with widely varying piscatorial skills and backgrounds fish side by side, everyone intent on bringing home for dinner a fresh fish they've caught *themselves*.

The *Black Hawk* is a bustling melting pot: young and old; male and female; black, white, Hispanic, Asian; families and those fishing alone; novices and sharpies, guys who fish 40 days or more a year on the boat and catch like crazy. They come from New York City and Philadelphia, Virginia and North Carolina, from across New England and just up the road. It's fun, egalitarian and affordable — \$75 a person and another \$7 if you rent a rod and reel.

The action on this warm and sunny day in late July

is fast and at times chaotic, with lots of fish, the usual tangles, and rod tips, hooks and sinkers going this way and that. To document a lively day on a head boat, we turned photographer Sam Dole loose with four Polaroid cameras and about 25 packets of instant film supplied by the German company Impossible, which makes instant film and refurbishes Polaroid cameras (the-impossible-project.com).

"The goal was to capture the timeless quality of this type of fishing," says Dole, 25, who lives in New York City. "Polaroid film is a great way of documenting memories and relating to memories. It creates a universal experience and an excitement from having the actual physical picture created right on the spot."

Dubrule sets the tone on the *Black Hawk*: fun, kid-friendly, buttoned up in the shippy manner that you want to see on a boat carrying 60-plus people. The pilot-house is open to anyone with a question for the captain or who just wants to look around. "You have to be a showman," Dubrule says. "The days of not talking to the customers are gone. You have a much more intelligent fisherman today, more informed."

Family

Dubrule and his crew work hard to ensure their paying passengers catch their fair share and have a good time. "I have the best mates in the business," says Dubrule, adding that he aims for a 10-to-1 ratio of anglers to mates. "The personalization is what makes us different."

En route to Montauk, Fred Bednarczyk and his two children, 6 and 8, duck into the wheelhouse to say hello to the captain. "The mates are amazing," says Bednarczyk, a Connecticut paramedic. "They treat the kids great. Everyone is treated as family. My kids talk about it all winter long until spring."

The deckhands are patient, and they move quickly around the busy boat, netting fish, clearing lines, answering questions, sorting out snafus. "We really do have a good operation," says the captain. "We're family-run. We put our best foot forward all the time. It shows in what we catch and how much we catch."

"He does what it takes to catch fish," says Bruce Witik, 62, of Harwinton, Connecticut, an experienced angler who fishes regularly on the *Black Hawk*. "And he'll stay out if he has to. I've been out on days when we're supposed to be in at 3 and we'll be out until 5."



"Got one, Cap," says a middle-aged fisherman on the starboard bow as he cranks up a porgy. "Now I can go home to my wife."

Michael Morgan, another regular, agrees. "Hands down, this boat is the best," says Morgan, of Stamford, Connecticut, who fishes maybe 40 times a season with Dubrule. "The customer-service experience is superior. They make an effort, even with people who can't fish. There's no coincidence that this boat is consistently full. They take care of their customers."

Punch from the past

Opinionated, outspoken and competitive, Dubrule is anything but a wallflower. "Corporate America, I am not," he says. Neither is he an aging dinosaur pining for the good old days, although one incident from the past is worth mentioning.

Back in 1983, the then 33-year-old captain put himself on the map when he harpooned a 3,500-pound great white shark and dragged it back to port. *Jaws* author Peter Benchley was among those critical of the kill; Dubrule fired back, implying that Benchley's complaints were akin to the pot calling the kettle black, given the impact that *Jaws* had on the rise of shark fishing. Dubrule donated the shark to a university for research and still brings the 16-foot fiberglass mount to outdoor shows, where it continues to attract gawkers.

"The shark is like the mafia," Dubrule says. "It hasn't lost its punch."

In addition to putting fish in the boat, Dubrule is a natural front man. He's comfortable speaking to a crowd, be it at a show or standing on a picnic table at 6:30 in the morning, addressing five dozen very distant relatives of Izaak Walton. "Obviously, we're going to have a full boat," he says. "And we're going to have some tangles. But we're one big happy family, so please don't get aggravated. I know everybody thinks they're a fisherman, but some people catch better than others." The mates check everyone's tackle and offer practical advice on the day's quarry.

"Everybody understands it at the dock," Dubrule says. "That's the problem. But between the dock and the boat, some people have a lobotomy."

Zeitgeist

On the way to the grounds, Dubrule mutters under his breath about the building northwest wind; fast drifts are tough for novices. At one point, he plays the role of a

science teacher, trying in vain to explain the dynamics of set and drift to his customers and what it means to have 30-some lines streaming off opposite sides of the boat at the same time.

And when someone on the port rail invariably snags the line of someone on the starboard side and a confounding mash-up of hooks, line and sinkers occurs, Dubrule sputters quietly to himself, out of earshot of the customers below. "What a cluster," he says, watching as a mate works quickly to clear the lines and get the parties back fishing. "What a mess."

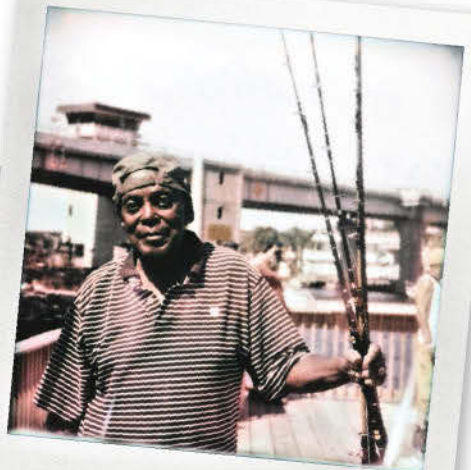
It's all part of the zeitgeist of party-boat fishing. The pilgrims smile, whoop and wrinkle their brows in concentration, jerking their rods to set the hook, trying to distinguish between a bite and their sinker bounding along the bottom. Lines regularly become crossed, reels jam, and plenty of nice fish come over the rail. Everybody appears to be having a having a good time.

As expected, the wind builds with the change of tide — breezing up to maybe 24 knots — and then backs off around 12:45 and eases more as the afternoon unfolds. We fish in a bit of a lee off Montauk Point, with the wind and flood offsetting one another and making for nice, comfortable drifts. It's a gorgeous day, and the fishing is good. Witik cranks in 15 porgies, one sea bass and a keeper fluke on single drift. "Right now it's too hectic," he says to a mate. "I almost like it when it's slower."

Dubrule eventually gives the signal, the last lines are brought in, the pool-winning fish (a fluke) is determined, and we head back to Niantic on a fair tide. Two mates scale and gut the catch while the others fillet all the way back to the dock. In the wheelhouse the captain, Witik and a newcomer play liar's poker, laugh, relax and tease one another. Flounder sleeps with her head over the bottom of the raised pilot-house door frame.

Below, tired fishermen sit in small groups and talk or close their eyes and enjoy the sun. Seas are calm, the sky blue. A smattering of cumulus clouds drifts across the north sky, and a dozen or more gulls hang like kites off the stern, dipping for skins and scraps.

"This is kind of a unique operation," says Dubrule. "I do it for the love of the game. I don't do it for the money. A lot of people do it just for the money, and it shows. I'd do it for nothing. They just don't know it." 🐟



BLACKHAWK

FAMILY FISHING FUN

www.FishNiantic.com

End of a long day: This 8-by-10-inch Polaroid of the crew (Capt. Dubrule is holding the rod) was shot with a special oversized camera and then fed into a remote processor mounted on the tailgate of the photographer's truck.



What You See Is What You Get

We photographed this feature with instant film and Polaroid cameras because we believed it would be the most revealing and fun way to capture the unique slice of Americana represented by fishing off a busy head boat on a summer day. A Polaroid shot is a “universal symbol of a fleeting memory,” says photographer Sam Dole, who documented the outing with about 200 frames. “It’s what we remember from when we were growing up.”

Dole has been a Polaroid shooter since he was a teen, when he used to bring an instant camera to school every day. “I was in love with the instant gratification,” says Dole, 25, a commercial and fine art photographer who lives in New York City. Point the camera, click the button, and it spits out a photograph you can share immediately. No cropping, no darkroom magic, no touching up. “What you see is what you get, yet with a unique twist no other camera can capture.”

Taking photos with a Polaroid camera can be challenging. The shooter gets just one chance to document a moment and get it right — compose the picture, get the horizon straight, shoot the action.

Polaroid cameras have a fixed lens, fixed perspective and fixed aspect ratio (you can’t change the print size). There’s not a lot of control over light, the sonar autofocus isn’t always spot on, and the color can be uneven if any of the 5,000 chemical interactions in the developing process go awry. But Dole says he likes the challenge of working with those limitations. The snapshots here aren’t “artsy-fartsy,” but rather an honest record of a day’s fishing on the 75-foot *Black Hawk*.

Polaroid stopped producing instant film and cameras in 2008, the year that the German company Impossible (sponsor of the film for this shoot) bought the last Polaroid film factory and reintroduced instant film with new chemistry at a limited number of outlets (the-impossible-project.com). At one time, Polaroid fans could find instant cameras at yard sales, but they are harder to come across now that collectors are scarfing them up.

Dole earned his BFA in photography from New York’s School of Visual Arts, where he received the Rhodes Award for outstanding achievement in photography. He specializes in non-conventional and alternative photography, including Polaroid. You can follow his work on Instagram at [@hello_i_am_sam_dole](https://www.instagram.com/hello_i_am_sam_dole). 🐟

A MONTANA COUPLE
HITCHHIKES ACROSS THE
SOUTH PACIFIC WITH
FLY RODS, SEARCHING
FOR SOLITUDE AND FISH
THAT HAVE NEVER SEEN
AN ARTIFICIAL FLY
BY ROB ROBERTS

pacific hitchhikers





The author casts a watchful eye over the flats on Palmerston Atoll in the Cook Islands.

“Have you seen this fish?” I asked a young boy passing by on the rutted dirt road. My French was awkward and halting — I hadn’t used it in nearly a decade — but I took a guess and called it *poisson-oisseux*. As I showed him a small drawing I had made with pencil and crayon, a gang of curious schoolkids on rusty pedal bikes quickly enveloped me. Apparently, tall, skinny white guys were an uncommon sight on Kauehi, a lazy tropical island in the Tuamotu Archipelago.

It was a crude picture of a bonefish, but I had no other means of gaining some local knowledge. No guides lived in the vicinity, and finding a tackle shop was out of the question. The kids fought over the drawing and exchanged perplexed murmurs until one of them exclaimed, *Oh, kio kio*. Then the rest of them erupted: *Oui, oui! Kio kio!* Jackpot. They pointed toward a small footpath and led the way as we snaked past barking dogs and overlaid coconut trees. Finally, we arrived at an endless white flat dotted with turquoise pockets of deeper water. I smiled and started rigging my fly rod — I had traveled thousands of miles by sailboat to get here, and I wasn’t going to waste a moment.

For years, I had longed to be part of the motley band of adventurers, dreamers and vagabonds who visited the South Pacific, from Capt. Cook to Gauguin. Sure, I wanted to cast from deserted white-sand beaches and enjoy the occasional cocktail over a sunset vista, but I had ambitions of more than just a one-off vacation. I was 37 and wanted to live by tidal shift and watch the rhythms of the sea unravel slowly, the way a river reveals its secrets to those who carefully cultivate it season by season.

The solution materialized on a two-week vacation to Baja a couple of years ago. My wife and I and another couple rented a 22-foot Catalina sailboat with Spartan accommodations, no lifelines and a 3-hp outboard. By day, we cruised among the islands of the Loreto Bay National Marine Park, trolling large deceivers on a 12-weight fly rod for tuna and dorado. In the evening we anchored in the protection of pocket bays hemmed in by steep, dry cliffs and paddled a tandem kayak along the rocky shorelines looking for jacks, yellowtail and barracuda. I realized then that a sailboat was the ultimate platform for a more intimate experience in marine exploration.

At first, the logistics of an extended trip through paradise seemed too challenging. Without enough money to outfit a bluewater sailboat, how does one even begin to explore more than 1,000 islands scattered over millions of square miles? In April 2013 we extricated ourselves from a comfortable life in Montana and set off to wander the reefs, tidal rivers and sand flats of the South Pacific. We found work as volunteer crew aboard cruising sailboats, trading time in the galley or on night watch for a berth to the next island or anchorage. In the dozen months that followed, we lived aboard seven boats, sailed a quarter of the way around the planet and visited 25 tropical islands in the South Pacific. We became oceanic hitchhikers, with fly rods and snorkeling gear in tow.

After a 33-day ocean passage from Panama to the Marquesas Islands, we cleared customs and promptly thumbed our way onto a 38-foot sloop skippered by a young Alaskan. He needed help on a five-day journey south to the Tuamotu Archipelago, the top of my “must fish” list.

Midway on the route from the Marquesas to Tahiti, this chain of small islands is an aquatic playground stretching nearly 800 miles. *Motu* means island in many Polynesian languages, but the Tuamotus are more precisely called atolls. They are C-shaped strips of land made of little more than sand and exposed reef, the remnants of volcanic rings that once spilled across the ocean like pepper from a generous shaker.

Atolls have interior lagoons that make for calm anchorages and great fisheries, but they also fill and drain with the tide, usually through a single narrow pass. If you hit the pass at slack tide, navigation can be smooth and uneventful. Time it wrong, and you’ll think you’re sailing upriver through a Class V rapid. After near calamity in our first attempt to navigate a pass, we were relieved to drop anchor in the small village of Kauehi.

Kauehi was typical of these remote outposts in French Polynesia. A large whitewashed church dominated the landscape, towering over concrete bungalows and outbuildings that lined the beach. Around a windswept point, several decrepit fishing shacks sat on stilts above scattered coral heads in a large bay. Other than the fresh baguettes flown in every other day on a local airline, provisions



The final resting place of a wreck on a fringing reef in American Samoa.

Camping on an uninhabited island in Tonga.





were basic — a single store had mostly barren shelves with little more than tinned meat, crackers and candy.

As I waded cautiously along the edge of that first flat on Kauehi, the kids who gave me the French lesson quickly got bored of my seeming ineptitude. They got back on their bicycles and disappeared. Soon I was standing alone in a knee-deep tropical bay watching a 5-foot lemon shark approach and nearly swim between my legs. Then, 100 yards away, a cluster of dorsal fins and tails formed out of a nearby trough and coursed over the flat like so many miniature gray sails. The fish were moving quickly, searching a long expanse of mostly featureless sand. And they were coming straight at me.

I took a deep breath and flicked a short cast in front of the lead fish. The whole pod bum-rushed the rubber-legged Gotcha as soon as it hit bottom, and I was quickly tethered to

a 5-pound Polynesian bonefish. As my cries of triumph boomed over the empty beach, I fumbled for my camera, getting ready to memorialize the occasion. For the rest of the afternoon, I continued searching for shadows and movement among bulbous coral heads and hollowed depressions. I ended up catching a half-dozen fish as large as 8 pounds — each time releasing them with a grateful nod of the head and a wistful *merci*.

The South Pacific covers an enormous area, stretching roughly from Easter Island off Chile to the eastern flanks of Australia. Despite their geographic grouping, the islands are truly disparate and distinct, with great diversity in terms of culture, ecology and climate. Factors such as latitude, ocean currents and the history of colonization intertwine to create a different feel for each country or island group.

Every spring around March or April, sailboats

leave the Americas and head west toward this fabled region. This pilgrimage is known as the Milk Run, a testament to the route's reputation for predictable trade winds and mellow weather patterns. Sailors typically make landfall in the Marquesas, resupply in Tahiti, then island-hop until the southern summer's cyclone season forces them to Australia or New Zealand. Because of the vastness of this territory, many places are overlooked along the way. My aim was to make fishing those hideouts the highlight of our yearlong trip.

Before leaving Montana I spent plenty of time online looking for blog posts from traveling fly fishermen, links to lodges and any other information I might find. Not much turned up. I realized the reason once we began our journey: I didn't see another fly angler in the 6,000 miles we traveled through these prime fishing waters.



The South Pacific traveler searches for bonefish on Kauehi Atoll in the Tuamotu island group in French Polynesia. Roberts didn't see another fly fisherman for 6,000 miles.

worn, but the combo had held up to years of being carted around on kayaking trips, jon-boats and airplanes. I carried a 9-weight Orvis T3 with a big-game reel and one backup spool. I overloaded the rig with 10-weight line to help with quick casts and punching through the stiff winds that are inevitable in a coastal environment.

There are too many islands, stories and spectacular sights from this year-long trip to write about all of them. A few that were worthy of note: scuba diving in the UNESCO World Heritage Site on Fakarava Atoll, taking in a world-class view from the top of Mount Otemanu in Bora Bora and playing volleyball with locals on the unspoiled beaches of Palmerston Island. And how could I forget saving that woman in Niue from nearly drowning? Or the bait ball that took shelter under our hull in Tonga and was relentlessly attacked by a school of tuna and jacks?

However, there is one enigmatic little hide-away that deserves more attention. It first appeared as a blip on the electronic charts. We were off course and chasing wind; small detours are common on a multiday passage. When I zoomed in the screen to investigate, the name popped up in blocky letters: Beveridge Reef.

From afar, the reef is a faint disturbance on the horizon, a thin line of white foam and agitated water. Imagine a volcano rising from the ocean floor and stopping just short of the surface so that the cone sits only inches below breaking waves. No land. No coconut trees or fishing shacks. Just a stunning, shallow lagoon a few miles in diameter, a protected anchorage dropped into the middle of a restless and roily sea.

As we got closer, we spotted an old fishing boat wrecked on the east side of the reef. The rusty steel trawler sat cantilevered, surging up and down with the tide. Huge rolls of nylon fishing line were still spooled on the deck. Later that evening, we dove into the engine compartment and speared two lobsters the size of house cats that hid under the darkness of metal panels.

Beveridge harbored a bonanza of aquatic life — an untapped zone where game fish still roamed in abundance. The diversity of fauna told me that the reef was too isolated for subsistence fishing and saw only sporadic commercial trips. Shortly after anchoring in 15 feet over a sandy bottom, I hopped into *El Coche* — our leaky and sagging Hypalon dinghy — to scout dropoffs and reef edges. I could


see schools of snapper and the hulky bronze shadows of red bass, which are easy to identify by the white spot on their tails. An occasional blue trevally raced away under the boat.

I double-hauled a size 4 red clouser over a submerged rock outcropping and counted to 10. On my first strip the line went tight, and a silver flash jerked toward the bottom. Then a sudden reversal had the fish coming straight at me as I struggled to keep up on the reel. A stout red bass, about 30 inches long, came launching out of the water.

"No way!" I yelled to no one in particular. Then I watched a 4-foot black-tipped reef shark follow in pursuit. Two more sharks appeared, and the bass was quickly devoured. The struggle lasted mere seconds. Undeterred, I motored to another location and tried again, with the same result.

I realized the predicament as my eyes slowly adjusted to the reality below. The pass was not only filled with game fish, but also a herd of savvy reef sharks that was following my each and every move. If predators are the hallmark of a thriving and healthy ecosystem, Beveridge Reef would pass just about any physical exam. I gave up and quit fishing for the day, trading my fly rod for a wet suit and mask to watch the underwater bounty up close.

Long days at sea naturally lead to deep analysis and reflection. I had been to deserted islands and offshore reefs. I had cast to unsuspecting bonefish, barracuda, grouper, tuna and many other species that filled a journal with catch totals, stories and observations. But flipping through the pages and reliving adventures, another theme emerged: solitude.

To find fish that had never seen a man-made fly — that had been my mantra. But in searching out the remote, I had missed something important: the chance to create memories based upon shared experiences. A year spent pushing toward new, empty horizons taught me an important lesson. There will always be another island to discover, another fish that has never seen an artificial fly. But there may not always be a chance to forge new friendships and revel in the companionship from a day spent fishing together. I missed the high-fives that come after a successful grip and grin, the satisfaction of finding a fish and letting a friend take the first cast, the shared joy when he sets the hook. I hadn't seen another fly fisherman during 6,000 miles of roaming through the South Pacific. Sometimes I wish I had. 

Since I didn't expect to find any outfitters along the way, I had to pack accordingly. But I was also hindered by our transient, hitch-sailor lifestyle — weight and space were precious. My whole existence had to be condensed into one large dry-bag backpack and a smaller bag for day trips. I focused on the essentials.

I started with a selection of flies sorted into two waterproof boxes. The first box was for the flats, including imitations of shrimp and crabs and other crustaceans. I had tied many of them over the years, leftovers from trips to Mexico, Honduras and elsewhere. The second box held larger baitfish patterns, such as deceivers and clousers, in various sizes, as well as needlefish imitations for barracuda and poppers for the top-water game. I also had a selection of 8- to 50-pound tippet, stainless steel pliers and a chest pack with random accessories.

I'll admit that my rod and reel were heavily



Author Jim Harrison has an eye for small gods, big trout and poet/guides with a weakness for good cheese and vodka.

AUTHOR JIM HARRISON IS THE
'UNTRAMMELED RENEGADE GENIUS' OF THE OUTDOORS

The Gospel According to Jim

BY CHRIS DOMBROWSKI PORTRAITS BY ANDY ANDERSON

I'm sitting at the Hitchin' Post in Melrose, Montana, drinking vodka with Jim Harrison, who between sips steals a scant glance at his beloved barmaid Nicole's rear, puffs from his American Spirit and says: "Do you want to know how you can believe in God?"

Smoke purls thickly from his cigarette, and in the window-parried shaft of evening light his face looks quite conjured, with his bad eye wandering opposite his working eye, one of them — I'm not sure which — attracted to some bird or small god darting just beyond my mortal perception.

"Absolutely," I say, swirling two soon-to-be-delicious cubes of vodka-and-lemon-soaked ice around my tumbler, "I totally want to know."

Beside us at the bar, ranchers and fishing guides — their horses and boats put away for the day — lean in to order beers or fries or shots from Nicole, whose brown hair fairly gleams against a white tank top as she leans down to reach for bottles, revealing ample cleavage, that space on a woman's body, essentially nothing, that so enamors the male heterosexual.

"It's a vacancy," Jim says, casually shifting our conversation from the theological to the sexual, "the absence of something that makes men incorrigible. A *nada*."

With his singular own, Jim catches Nicole's dark eyes and asks to buy a drink (he pronounces her name Knee-cole) for his friend Craig, who just has arrived at the bar's bright door in his wheelchair. Disabled from the waist down last winter in a car ac-

cident, Craig is Nicole's ex-boyfriend, two boyfriends removed, and would likely receive a free drink, anyway. But Nicole obliges and laces ice, vodka and a splash of soda into a short glass and then, as if by instinct, fills our glasses, as well.

Jim lifts his glass to mine. "Peacock" — Jim's friend, the author and grizzly bear expert Doug Peacock — "tells me that new indisputable" — he puffs vigorously on his cigarette — "archaeological evidence points to the fact bears have been feeding on migrating cutworm moths in precisely the same drainage in the Front Range near Glacier Park for over thousands of years, and recently Peacock determined the bears now arrive before the moths — they wait out the moths' arrival, whereupon they gorge themselves into a food coma! I'll order us two steaks — Knee-cole, two steak sandwiches rare, please, another vodka for Craig. They say there are more nutrients per part in a cutworm moth than in a cutthroat trout."

By now I have finished my vodka and am staring straight at Jim, his tanned face gullied with wrinkles and crow's feet. He clears his throat — a momentarily worrisome racket that recalls a yard dog snarling at a paperboy — and fixes my gaze.

"And that, son, is how you can believe in God."

How I got to know Jim Harrison — outdoorsman, roving gourmand and man of letters, “untrammelled renegade genius” and beloved author of more than 30 books, including *Dalva* and *Legends of the Fall* — is another story, the short version of which goes: I was born in his old hometown and grew up on Harrison Road, and he takes kindly to coincidence and fishing guide/poets with a penchant for good cheese and cold vodka.

For now, we’re going fishing on the Big Hole, where Jim spends 50 or 60 days each summer, and Carhartted from head to toe but for the Muck boots, he’s knocking at the screen door to my cabin.

“Are you ready for some sausage patty?” he asks.

“I don’t know if I can handle sausage,” I say. “I’m still a tad jangled from last night. You?”

“A little bit hung over, but that’s to be expected of a Marine of fly-fishing. I’m famished from forging the smithy of my soul. I wrote a poem this morning! Come, we must find sustenance,” Jim says, aiming his substantial frame toward the Hitchin’ Post’s café, which sits a mere 50 yards from the cabin.

He doubles back and picks up his fly rod, a newer-model Orvis 7-weight coupled with an early-1990s Daiwa reel (perhaps the only such combo in all of southwest Montana), which is separated into its two pieces and held together with two heavy-duty rubber bands.

Inside the café, we find our friend and fishing partner, novelist David James Duncan, chatting up the guides who are picking up their sack lunches from Sherri, Nicole’s aunt, queen of the morning shift. We sit down to hot drinks, and David tells us what he’s learned from the locals: The river rose with an overnight rain, and although it’s crested, it won’t likely fish well till the afternoon, the Big Hole’s trout feeding mostly after the water’s warmed away their lethargy.

“How about the bugs?” Jim asks, referring to the fabled *pteronarcys californica*, the salmon fly hatch that the angling masses covet.

“Mostly in the canyon or up above, with the bulk around Silver Bridge,” David says. David is one of the best anglers I’ve ever fished with, dangerously good, but he has disguised himself this morning as a faux rancher — old green Carhartt jacket over two mismatched flannels, collars up — and thus the normally tight-lipped guides have been generous with their intel.

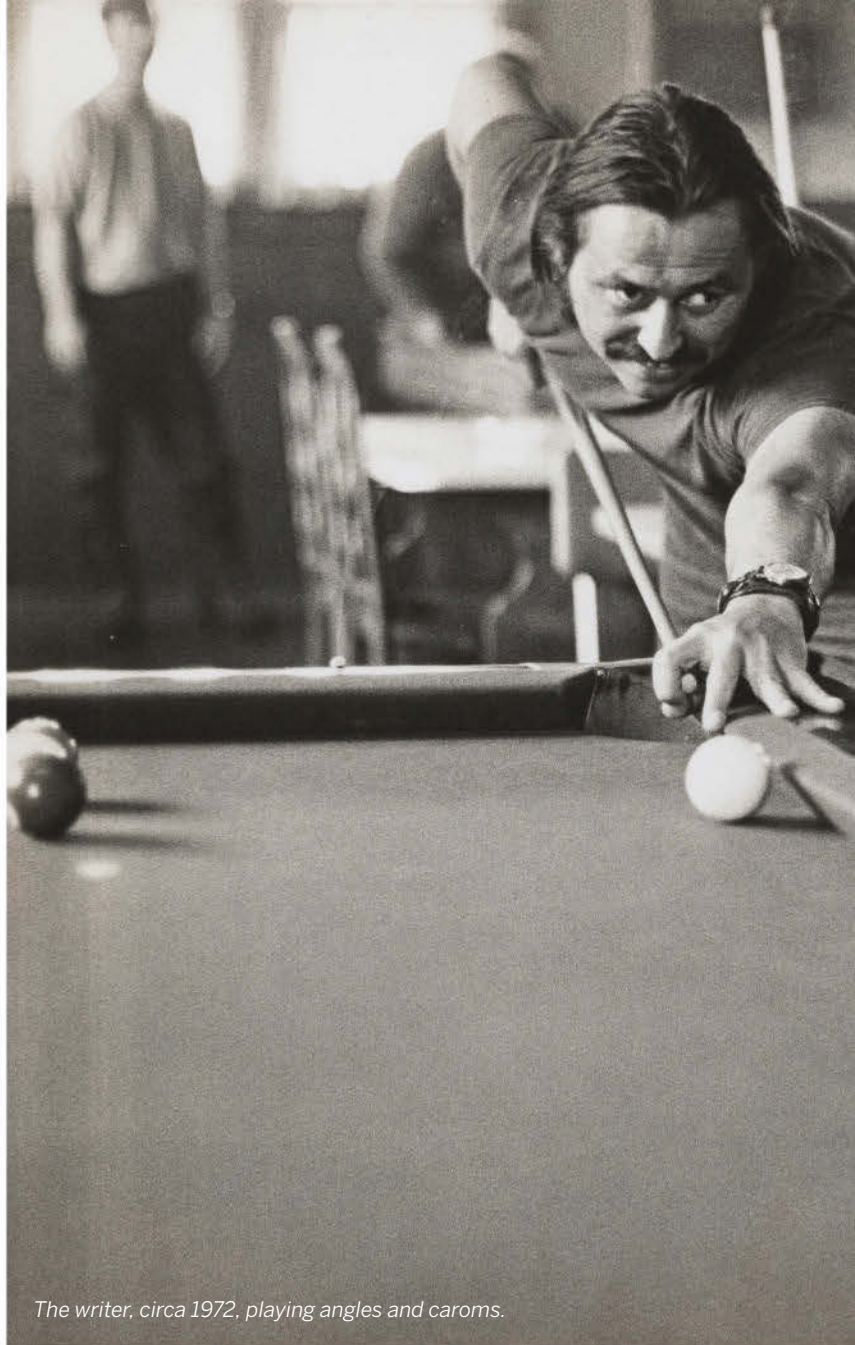
“Good,” Jim says. “We should go downstream, then, and cover a big chunk of water. Stay away from the loons.”

The loons will arrive momentarily from Bozeman and Butte and Spokane and Salt Lake to chase the upstream “migration” of the 3-inch-long stonefly’s mating flights and the toilet-bowl-flush rises these aquatic rib steaks induce from the trout. Only immensely well-cultured anglers such as ourselves would prefer to fish downstream of the hatch; we prefer the solitude and good company, we tell each other, but we also know the downstream brown trout have already bulked up on stoneflies, and if we can put a streamer deep enough under the right cutbank, we stand to catch the fish of the season, a 2-foot, 6-pound brown.

“How about Glen to the Notch, then?” I suggest. “I know a perfect lunch spot, and I have some morels and chicken to heat up on the stove.”

“I rolled a whopper down there last week,” Jim says. Jim has been fishing out of Melrose at least two days a week so far this season, exhibiting what David calls a “liturgical dedication” to the Big Hole’s dynamic character. The river — which heads meanderingly in the high meadows near Chief Joseph Pass (a setting in Jim’s second novel, *A Good Day to Die*) before charging bullishly through Dewey and Maiden Rock canyons and slowing somewhat through cottonwood-lined bottomlands near Glen, with sandstone cliffs for a frame and the snowcapped Pinters for a backdrop — suits Jim’s temperament and his ability, so exhibited in his diverse body of written work, to “contain multitudes.”

“The brown inhaled the fly three times, but I missed it ‘cause I was



The writer, circa 1972, playing angles and caroms.

watching two garish tanagers fight over a mayfly,” Jim says. “The birds insisted their beauty was more important than my lifetime brown trout, and who am I to disagree with such creatures?”

Jim’s response recalls something I read in a recent interview he gave to a publication in France, where he is a veritable folk hero.

“Do you believe in the supernatural?” the interviewer asked.

“Of course I do,” Jim said, “because I receive special instructions from the gods. In America I have a book called *In Search of Small Gods*. Do you really expect one God to create 19 billion galaxies? And did you know that one teaspoon of cosmic black hole weighs 3 billion tons? Think how strong this teaspoon has to be. So if there are 19 billion galaxies, why can’t I have a soul, even if it is extremely small? As small as a photon or, better yet, as one of my neurons. It never occurred to me not to believe in the resurrection.”

“Where’s your flask?” Jim asks me.

The drift boat is anchored a few miles downstream from the Glen Bridge, and we’re snacking on a wedge of Manchego while David plies a



side channel on foot. The grass along the bank of the rivulet grows thick and high, the seed heads already heavy, and from our vantage David's hat and moving fly rod are the only human intrusions visible against the landscape, the graphite glinting with each cast or when it bows under the weight of a fish or bucks with a fish's run; when David kneels to unhook and release a fish, he disappears altogether.

"You mean my vodka flask?"

"Last year I was flying to Paris with Dustin Hoffman, and we were lamenting the spate of interviews we had lined up upon arrivals. 'Dustin,' I said, 'how do you put up with it all?' And he said, 'Jim, it's easy. I just fill up a water bottle with vodka and sip off it all through the day.' And I told him, 'Ha! I know a poet and a fishing guide in Montana who does the exact same thing!'"

"I quit bringing it during high water," I say. "It did protect against inane clients, but it's too easy to make a mistake sober, let alone buzzed."

I don't need to expound for Jim. Two years ago, he and I floated Rock Creek at flood stage the day before a veteran oarsman flipped his boat and lost a passenger to the cold, swift water and, ultimately, a sweeper. From his home in Livingston, Montana, Jim read the news and called

me. He must have sensed I might feel some guilt for having taken him down such a treacherous stretch of river.

"Dommer," he said, "don't feel bad about it. The world is a cruel place. This much we know."

"Let me see that rod of yours," I say. Jim has had a few tugs on his streamer — one violent slash from a big fish that sent him into a near-orgasmic state of excitement — but the last hour of fishing has been exceedingly uneventful. "I just saw David hook another fish. I'm going to trail something off of your Yuk-Bug."

"Not a worm!" Jim says, referring to the dreaded San Juan worm, an imitation of an aquatic worm whose flyness is often disputed in angling circles. "But I know what you're thinking. Trust me, I worked in Hollywood for two decades. Nymphing is like bare skin to the film industry. Whenever things get slow ..."

"Show 'em some tit?" I ask.

"Precisely, son! Now, no nymphs for me. I'll take my lumps. Let's try a Little Olive," he says, alluding to a No. 10 woolly bugger tied with ragged grizzly hackle and wrapped with significant lead by Jim's friend and longtime guide Dan Lahren, a legendary Montana outdoorsman.

And take lumps Jim does. With David back in the boat sharing Ikkyu quotes (*Clouds very high look, the Zen poet wrote eight centuries ago, not one word helped them get up there*) we drift downstream. Jim covers the water as thoroughly as a flock of swallows covers the air above the river at dusk — there isn't an inch of holding water that he doesn't fail to twitch the fly seductively through — but no grabs from the big browns who have shied away from the high sun. I'm rowing hard against the snow-fed currents, trying my two-armed best to hold the drift boat adjacent to the prime lies, so I see only Jim's tan fly line at the edge of my periphery, zinging back and out against the banks. Every now and then he stops casting to marvel at a warbler or a tanager, to feel, as he says in one of his poems, "the grace of their intentions," and then returns his attention to the water and his casts.

He's practicing what I've long thought of as "Jim Yoga," focusing his attention alternately skyward (mountains, birds, clouds) and at ground level (dogs, trout, plants). It's a ritualistic way of moving through the world that's revived him, of seeing through eyes other than his own — and those of us who've read his books have been revived, as well.

"If you spend a fair amount of time studying the world of ravens," he's said elsewhere, "it is logical, indeed, to accept the fact that reality is an aggregate of the perceptions of all creatures, not just ourselves."

Save for the squeaking oarlocks and the water lapping at the hull, the boat is wonderfully quiet. Flicker calls, warbler note cascades, wind, around us the scent of budding cottonwoods on which we base our faith. Then Jim says, "Come on, trout! You don't want to see little Jimmy throw a tantrum, do you? You know, Davey, I once caught a 3-pound brown on this left bank coming up. Right ..." he pauses and waits for his Little Olive to slap against the bank, "here!"

And before he can strip the line, a chunky brown trout cartwheels out of its element for the fly, latches on to the hook, and Jim lets out a whoop. We are all three more than a little dumbfounded. David and I exchange glances of substantial bafflement as I slip the net under the fish.

"Mystery," poet James Galvin wrote, "moves in God-like ways."

We lunch on my favorite island in the world, a cottonwood dry wash that divvies a slow side channel from the hard-rushing main river, which passes the land, then slams hard into a tall sandstone cliff, pivots sharply to the east and hurtles downstream. The two currents meet and form a lazy back eddy, above which swallows are usually on



Angle of repose: Harrison listens to music the rest of us can't hear.

the hunt, and above the water, adjacent the cliff, sloping steadily to the north, a deep swale hosts tall grasses and sage.

I say “we lunch,” but I have forgotten the propane for my portable grill. (I could build a fire and cook over coals, but we expect the fishing to turn on within the hour.) In the cooler I have chicken thighs marinating in olive oil, Tabasco, salt, pepper and thyme, some fresh asparagus and, as an appetizer, some morels I gathered a few days ago from a mountain burn near Missoula, Montana — but no gas and, thus, no fire for the Roving Gourmand and The Guru, the latter of whom doubtless sees the disappointment in my eyes.

“I have some Washington Coho that I grilled last night,” David says. “And a bottle of wine.”

“I don’t drink before 4 in the afternoon,” Jim says, “but of course wine at lunch on the river is not drinking. Here, son, cut yourself some salami — did I show you this wine key and knife a peasant woman gave to me in France? We’ll have a tidy snack, and then how about a nap in the warm sand?”

We eat the cold, smoky wild salmon, wash it down with gouts of Côtes du Rhône and chew on thick slices of salami, and soon we’re lounging in the shade of some young cottonwoods with our hands behind our heads like old cowhands. We’ve all three had long years — health issues, legal issues, money issues — but like good migratory creatures we’re back along a familiar shore, contemplating the currents. Dangerous as the river is, Jim wrote recently in a poem, “only the water is safe.”

I’m not so much startled awake because I wasn’t really sleeping, but Jim’s nasally voice surprises me. “You found yourself a nice island here, Dommer.”

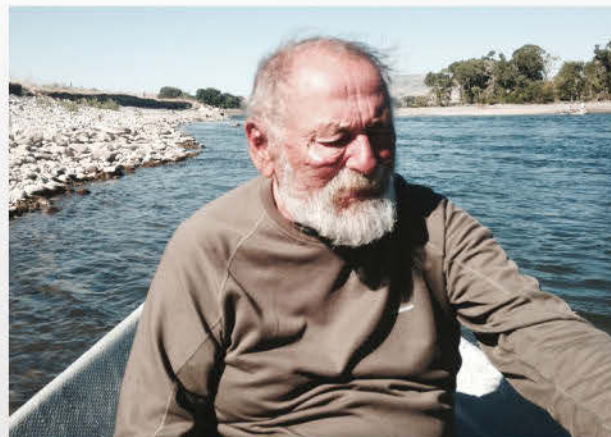
With a noticeable smile on his face, David is still sleeping, so I tell Jim in a whisper about how several years ago I camped here with my wife, Mary, and our infant son, and how after nursing all night, our son still wouldn’t sleep, so I held him in the camp chair before dawn so Mary could nod off. The river rushed around the island and ran smack into the cliff, then caromed through an audible riffle that charged through a short box canyon.

The stars wheeled, the earth turned, but momentarily I felt that we — my son and I — sat outside time. It grinds the mind down, the sound of shallow water, and as the old goateed poet next to me once said, the mind ground is being as it is.

“That’s a wonderful story,” Jim says. “We must honor it with a 4-pound brown this afternoon. Davey, wake up, the fish await with open mouths!”

What I love most about fishing with Jim is that he’s constantly altering your perception of him, which allows you to alter your perception of yourself, to be malleable like the current. Without a soft mind, someone said, you cannot be very strong. Jim is ox-big these days, and I wouldn’t ask him to outrun a mule, but his mind moves like a jackrabbit. At 70-something years old, he seems to be certain of only a few things: good wine, garlic and the necessity of time on the water. Fishing a few moments later, though, he is certain that a red-bellied Yuk Bug — a white-legged, grizzly-hackled, squirrel-tailed, 3-inch-long beast — is precisely the fly he needs. “I had a fish strike this so hard last year,” he says, “it yanked the rod out of my hands.”

We find no such denizens downstream, but the bite is on. Solid fish swirl on our streamers on the dump (as they land), on the swing (as they hook downstream with the current) and on the strip (as they dance at the hands of the anglers turned puppeteers). David has a secret retrieve — he strips line vigorously and darts the rod tip back and forth at the surface of the water — that makes his streamer, an articulated creation that we call the Fly-Fisherman’s Rapala, look precisely like a flagging minnow, but makes him look as if he’s playing air guitar.



RIVER VI

BY JIM HARRISON

I thought years ago that old Heraclitus was wrong.

You can’t step into the same river even once.

The water slips around your foot like liquid time and you can’t dry it off after its passage.

Don’t bother taking your watch to the river, the moving water is a glorious second hand.

Properly understood the memory loses nothing and we humans are never allowed to let our minds sit on the still bank and have a simple picnic.

I had an unimaginable dream when young of being a river horse that could easily plunge upstream.

Perhaps it came from our huge black mare June whom I rode bareback as she swam the lake in big circles, always getting out where she got in.

Meanwhile this river is surrounded by mountains covered by lodgepole pines that are mortally diseased, browning in the summer sun. Everyone knows that lightning will strike and Montana burn.

We all stay quiet about it, this blessed oxygen that makes our world a crematory. Only the water is safe.

— from *Songs of Unreason*

Tugged upstream beside a riprap bank, the fly zigzags across the surface and is engulfed by a violent buttery swirl. Big brown. David’s rod shakes with animal energy, then straightens as the fish comes unglued. Jim hollers — he’s latched on to a 20-inch rainbow that river-dances across the riffle on its tail. I net Jim’s broad-shouldered fish, and we pledge to toast its surface-skimming leap tonight, its lengthy exit from its watery world.

Driving home on the Burma Road, we pass an old dilapidated house — doorless, windowless, roof caved in by a windfall cottonwood — home, if you ask the locals, to one of the largest, most seething dens of rattlesnakes in the valley.

“Son, do you see that old house?” Jim says.

“Sure I do.”

“Good. Do you know what it says?”

“No, what does it say?”

“It says, don’t let your life become the sloppy leftovers of your work.”

It’s evening, and the light across the green-for-a-few-more-weeks hills makes the sage look like suede. I want what Jim said to sink in, to eddy in my brain and take root, but the moment vanishes like a cloud shadow

“Well, boys, you just missed your chance to buy Lois Lane a drink.”

on the snowfields of the distant Pioneers because we pass a roadside pond, a ditch really.

“Chris, slow down! Back up! Phalaropes in the pond!” David says.

I back the truck and boat trailer carefully up the road and see them: four small birds spin around and around, dervish-like, on the dusk-lit water, dislodging food from the weeds below them that they dip down occasionally to eat. They turn and turn like oblong tops. They are doing something we humans couldn’t do. We are silent for a long moment. Then Jim says: “My God. Four phalaropes. We are blessed!”

An Afterword of Sorts

Jim and I floated the lower Yellowstone last September, along with my friend Jeffrey Foucault, a nonpareil songwriter from Wisconsin exiled to New England, whose musical acumen is nearly trumped by his taste in wine. Dinner the previous night had been a big affair, with most of the Harrisons’ Livingston-based family tableside enjoying baked ham, beans, slaw — all prepped exquisitely by Jim’s wife, Linda, and their novelist daughter Jamie — under a snappy homemade horseradish that made one’s nose run and one’s eyes water pleasantly.

We were nearly two dozen, and we ate and talked and drank red wine, opening bottles that ascended gradually in body and nuance while conversing intently with the horseradish. I thought I was holding a high face card in a 2008 Barolo, which was met with much appreciation. But when Jeff pulled a dusty ’63 Colibuono from his kit bag, the table — full of very well-versed wine drinkers — went quiet. We relished Jeff’s gift in jam-jar glasses, tickled that it was possible to step from the high-elevation Barolo to the stratospheric chianti, which, as Jim reminded us, “could easily have sucked,” had it been corked or turned.

Good fortune seemed with us on the river, too. A big trout rolled on Jeff’s stonefly dry on the tail end of a cliff across from the boat launch, just where Jim had told him to cast. The Yellowstone below Springdale is, next to the Big Hole, Jim’s home river, which means he’s caught at least a fish or two on every serviceable bank for 30-some miles and is happy to remind the exploratory oarsman: “Wrong bank, son,” from his seat in the stern when necessary.

During the initial salvo a few small fish came to hand, but our attention gradually veered toward a discussion of lunch and the fried chicken Jim had brought — specifically, would the ratio of thighs to breasts be appropriate?

After the previous night’s supper, Jeff had played a show at Livingston’s Murray Bar to a surprisingly raucous crowd, and post-show there’d been a round and then another bought for the singer and his poet roadie by a plucky 60-something brunette wearing horn-rimmed glasses and looking vaguely familiar. After a while she vanished, and the bartender, sweeping up tips with a coaster, said, “Well, boys, you just missed your chance to buy Lois Lane a drink.” We stared back.

Margot Kidder? Superman? “Son of a bitch,” one of us said. “God-damn,” said the other.

Another Livingston Sunday night.

All of which is to say, when — nearing noon, after flicking a 40-foot cast deftly toward a grassy undercut — Jim asked, “Dommer, what did you bring to drink,” I’m pretty sure I heard a parched Jeff mumble, “mind reader.”

“Just a modest Gringnolino,” I said.

Jim groaned — “I thought a poet of your considerable talent would have had the good sense to bring some shooters” — then pulled a Smirnoff airplane bottle from his Carhartt vest pocket and grinned mis-

chievously. “Let’s pull into the next shady bank and eat. It’s too sunny for a big fish to move on my streamer and not windy enough for hoppers.”

Thus, in the grand manner of the New West, we ate supermarket fried chicken and drank Italian wine. In my shirt pocket, wrapped in foil, I had a square of the most exquisite apple cake I’d ever tasted, leftover dessert cooked by Jim’s daughter Anna. Oarsman needing more strength than angler, I hoarded it justifiably while to our south the September sun crested the Absarokas and cast a light too hot to feel autumnal; climbing, it teased out the stark granitic veins in the high country of the Crazy Mountains across the river to the north, the sharp peaks still waiting for fall’s first dusting of snow.

With the boat anchored below a heavy riffle, we were quiet, but then again we were fishing, and the big river, formed by water that had come a long way to get where it was, had our ears, especially Jim’s — the distance seemed to call to him, an old dog listening to a music the rest of us can’t quite hear.


After lunch we went begging for a long spell and then — following a 15-minute blow from the south and Jim’s tale of how he and his family survived for eight years on 10 grand per until he sold *Legends of the Fall* for high six-figures — we were flush. Fish were on Jeff’s hopper and on Jim’s streamer as it landed, perhaps taking the latter for a struggling terrestrial. On the fly-patch of the borrowed drift boat, I found a well-used No. 12 flying ant pattern and handed it to Jeff, whose fly had begun to unravel. “Just a hunch.”

For a few bends, Jeff couldn’t miss. In the back, Jim landed a solid Yellowstone cutthroat and reeled up — “I’m good” — so that he could point out the shady bank’s finer lies to Jeff, many of them farther offshore than I would have parsed, his mind barb-sharp despite his body’s frailty, his casts reined in due to tiring eyesight. We had a real nice run for half an hour, punctuated by a long cutthroat’s five-second inspection of the ant pattern — the fish looked like a sommelier with a glass of wine turned up to his discerning nose. Then Jeff broke the fly off in the cotton-white maw of a brown trout shaped like a two-by-four, the wind clocked around to the north, and we were panhandling again.

Jim was wearing his shirt, which I took to mean that his shingles, so debilitating over the past few years, weren’t bothering him badly. Fishing-wise, had we set any records? Certainly not. But we’d stood out in the metaphorical rain long enough to be struck by lightning, what a poet must do, or so one poet said.

Driving home toward Livingston, we passed the mouth of the drainage of a small river, up which, while wade-fishing the previous afternoon, Jeff and I had seen a pair of black wolves ford the shallows not 50 yards downstream. We shared the story with Jim — the sound of the water rushing around their muscular haunches, light shimmering on their wet fur — and with ample awe he offered some thoughts as to what such a potent encounter might mean cosmologically to those who witnessed it, but his words seemed best left in the wind, returned to eternity, if you will.

Helping Jim out of the truck with the aid of his walking stick, I thought of how the river rounds its rocks, softening their edges over time. He ran through a 10-item checklist, making sure Jeff had transferred the gear to his car. “Good boys,” he said. “There’s two chicken thighs in the cooler for you.”

I understood we might not have the chance to float together again, but despite the masses who clamor for some illusion of “closure,” I sided with the river, eschewing the notion altogether. We went fishing. I hope we’ll go again. A loss of faith, after all, begins with a loss of ritual. 



Only the water is safe, says the poet.

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THE OFFSHORE PHOTOGRAPHY OF TOM SPENCER, WHO CUT HIS TEETH SHOOTING WITH AN iPhone





A fleet of mostly Carolina-built boats returns to Oregon Inlet after competing in a Pirate's Cove billfish tournament.



WHO Tom Spencer, 27, founder of Fish Hunt Photo.

WHAT Fishing photographer from North Carolina.

WHEN & WHERE This past summer Spencer traveled the East Coast shooting tournaments, but he really enjoys the year-round fishing scene in his hometown of Beaufort, North Carolina.

WHY His first professional assignments were to shoot portraits and job sites, but Spencer quickly gravitated toward photographing his passions: hunting and fishing.



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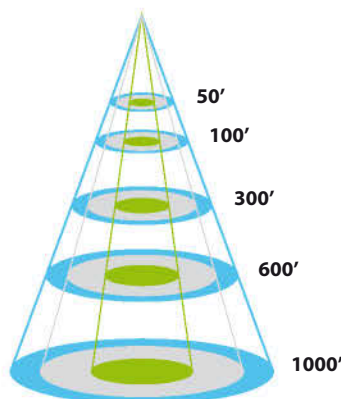
HOW In college, Spencer took a couple of intro-level courses with a 35mm film camera. After he graduated, he did the bulk of his training with an iPhone. “I didn’t really have money for the latest and greatest gear, but I was always just snapping shots with my iPhone, constantly practicing composition. That’s how I kept my eyes trained,” says Spencer. A fishing trip to the Everglades inspired him to upgrade his equipment. He now shoots with a Nikon D7100 digital SLR camera, but it’s his compositions that Spencer credits for his early success. 🐟





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Like Brothers

CAPT. TED DEPPE AND HIS CLOSE-KNIT CREW ARE SERIOUS TOURNAMENT FISHERMEN
STORY AND PHOTOS BY GEORGE SASS SR.

It's goose bumps time. The sun is just about to rise, and diesel fumes and the sound of raw horsepower fill the air. "Being on our team is like being part of the family. And once you're in, you're in for life," shouts Capt. Ted Deppe over the roar of the Viking 52's 820-hp MAN diesels. We're heading out of Ocean City, Maryland, to fish the 2015 White Marlin Open. His team consists of the same five anglers and two mates who, for the most part, have been together on *Kingfisher* for the past 10 to 25 years.

Tom Jones, Deppe's 73-year-old father-in-law and the owner of *Kingfisher*, is on board to take his turn in the fighting chair and to enjoy his role as the team's patriarch. "Tom, or 'King Bone' as he is known on the circuit, is the ideal owner," says Deppe, who is 53. "He's really responsible for putting this team together, and he makes sure we have whatever we need to have a successful season."

When Deppe's not fishing *Kingfisher*, he runs his own contracting company. Between fishing and remodeling jobs, he somehow finds time to share his opinions on politics, hull designs, engines, electronics, fishing techniques and favorite watering holes with just about anyone within earshot. Fellow contractors know him as a demanding taskmaster who doesn't suffer fools or slackers lightly. He's the quintessential "lead, follow or get out of my damned way" kind of guy. With his take-charge persona and 6-foot, 5-inch, 265-pound frame, he's a fearless yet lovable team leader.

Kingfisher won the 2013 White Marlin Open, taking home more than \$1 million in prize money. It was not a fluke. They've done well in other major tournaments, as well. Even when *Kingfisher* doesn't place, Deppe's team can be on the receiving end when tournament checks are written. "The way Calcuttas work, we've often been in the money," the captain says. "We've also won money in the local tournaments we've fished. My owner and crew are successful businessmen, so they're always striving for a good return on their investment."

But as Deppe readily admits, tournament fishing is far from a sure bet. "Last year," he notes, "we didn't cash any checks."

This year's tournament has drawn more than 300 boats

competing for nearly \$4 million in prize money, a record in the event's 42-year history. Multiply the number of boats by a typical crew of between four and eight, add several hundred more eager spectators, family members and sponsors, sprinkle in a few thousand cold beers and rum-and-cokes, spice it all with a Caribbean-style rock band and you have the ingredients for one hell of an opening night party. Somewhere in the midst of all this hoopla is the captain's meeting. But from the sound of it, most of these guys have been here before, and the meeting doesn't really interrupt the dockside festivities. In less than 10 hours, those who choose to fish the first day of the five-day event will be heading out in search of their slice of that \$4 million pie. Each boat can fish any three of the five days, the captains basing their decisions partly on weather forecasts, boat issues, crew availability and, of course, superstition.

Monday's predawn gathering aboard *Kingfisher* reveals a team of unusual camaraderie. Bear hugs, not handshakes, are the preferred way of saying "Hey man, good to see you." Handshakes are for strangers or acquaintances. These guys are a band of brothers. In fact, angler Tommy Jones is Deppe's brother-in-law. So is Greg "Fish Bone" Jones, one of *Kingfisher*'s two mates. Both have been fishing *Kingfisher* since 1990. The other mate, Kayvan Bahrarmi, has been working the boat for the past 10 years. Anglers Bill Britt and Mike McCarthy have been part of the team for the past 10 to 15 years. The "newcomer," Has Lehnert, became a team member five years ago.

It's 5:30 a.m., and with Deppe at the helm, each crewmember takes his favorite spot in the saloon, curling up for the 2-1/2-hour ride to Washington Canyon. It's only blowing 15 to 20, and the early-morning seas haven't quite decided whether they are going to behave. When Deppe eventually throttles back, everyone gets vertical in a hurry. Fish Bone and Kayvan immediately go into a controlled frenzy in the cockpit. Outriggers are released. Teasers are readied. Dredges are assembled. Ballyhoo are rigged, some for swimming, others for skipping. Aloft, Deppe readies the bridge teaser reels. Except for deciding the order of the anglers to take the rod when there's a strike, hardly



Greg "Fish Bone" Jones, a mate aboard the Viking 52 Kingfisher, prepares a dredge.





Kingfisher's band of brothers (from left): Bill Britt, Tommy Jones, Mike McCarthy, Tom "King Bone" Jones, Greg "Fish Bone" Jones, Has Lehnert, Kayvan Bahrarmi and Capt. Ted Deppe.



This Viking 52 is a happy boat and a winning boat.

a word is spoken. Everyone knows their place and understands their job. Deppe has *Kingfisher* where he wants her, the mates have her rigged for action, and the anglers are ready to fish. It is just minutes before 8:30 a.m., the official start of the tournament.

Trolling for marlin has sometimes been described as hours of unbearable boredom interrupted by moments of exhilaration. As morning nears early afternoon, the tediousness of trolling without a strike slowly shifts to frustration. The fish are not biting, and the sea is not cooperating, building from manageable 3- to 4-footers sitting on ocean rollers to uncomfortable 5- to 6-footers, with an occasional 8-footer that keeps things interesting. Deppe monitors the VHF, hoping to hear some encouraging chatter from other boats. He decides to move. One word to his mates, and the cockpit frenzy begins again, only in reverse. There is no time to waste, and his team operates with the speed and efficiency of a NASCAR pit crew. Within a few short minutes all lines, teasers and dredges are out of the water, and *Kingfisher* is on plane, battling through the increasingly snotty seas.

An hour later, lines are back in. Within minutes, a strike. Lots of quick movement in the cockpit but few words. It's like watching a silent movie. It's a small dolphin. Suddenly, another strike and another dolphin. From above, Deppe points to the choreographed activity below. "These guys know exactly what to do," he says. "There's no shouting. No running into each other. It's because they've been together all these years."

With the crew focused on watching for another strike, the worsening sea conditions are of little concern. Another strike. It's a white marlin. Suddenly a rogue 8-footer catches *Kingfisher* broadside, and a



Deppe captains Kingfisher for owner Tom Jones, who makes sure the team has what it needs to compete successfully on the tournament circuit.

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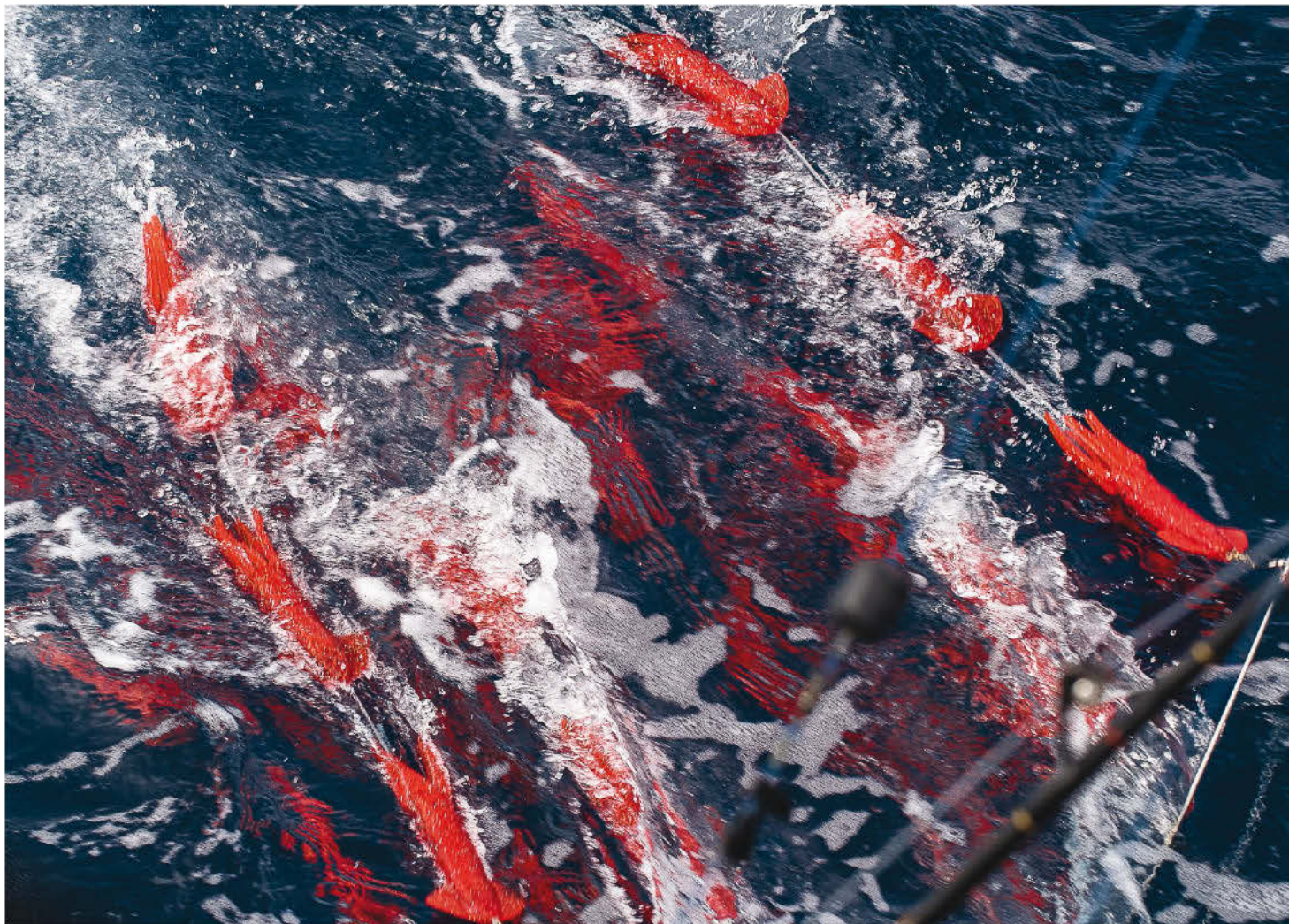
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Dredges are periodically brought to the surface to check for fouling. The *Kingfisher* crew is tested, seasoned and has been together for years.

200-pound ice chest slides across the flybridge, crushing my camera bag. No chance now for a shot of the elusive *Kajikia albidus*. But the marlin isn't close to the 70-pound limit to qualify, and it's released. All too soon it is 3:30 p.m., the official time to pull in lines and head home.

The sea conditions are now even worse. It's going to be a rough, bone-rattling, wet ride, even for this tested battlewagon and seasoned crew. "This is when I'd rather be a mate than captain," admits Deppe. "Everyone else can find a place to wedge themselves in down below."

He has a point. While his crew finds a dry, comfortable place in the saloon within arm's reach of ice-cold brewskies, Deppe resigns himself to being on the bridge for the grueling three-hour ride home.

Surprisingly, the mood below is cheerful. Neophytes might be bitching and moaning about the disappointing catch and miserable conditions, but these guys have seen it all. Except for King Bone, each is in his 50s. Although busy with their careers, they've fished just about everywhere, from the East Coast to the Bahamas, from Hawaii to Costa Rica, Guatemala, Cabo San Lucas, Panama, Brazil, Vanuatu and more. Collectively they have more than 135 years of tournament fishing on *Kingfisher* alone.


Deppe was born to fish. He grew up Catonsville, Maryland, building crude rafts to fish his local rivers. Other times he climbed out on overhanging tree limbs to drop a line into the water. While serving as captain of another sportfishing boat during the 1992 White Marlin Open, he met his wife, Kathy, Tom Jones' daughter. He later joined *Kingfisher* as a mate and has been captain for the past 12 years.


So Deppe and his band of brothers know better than to be bummed. Lady Luck simply hasn't been with them. But that's no reason not to joke around, tell tall tales, exaggerate fish stories and make plans to raise hell when they get back on land. Catching or not, in calm seas or snotty conditions, this is one happy boat. And anyone who knows anything about tournament fishing knows that a happy boat is a winning boat.

The three-hour roller-coaster ride seems to fly by. Halfway through it, Fish Bone relieves Deppe at the helm. Deppe dries out from the wet ride above, and the gang cracks jokes and pops cold ones.

As *Kingfisher* returns to its slip, the anglers are met by the rest of the family. Owner, captain, angler, mate, brother, brother-in-law, mother-in-law, wife and daughter — all members of the *Kingfisher* clan.

"If this boat could tell stories," laughs Deppe, "we'd have to kill it." It's easy to see why they're in this for life.

POSTSCRIPT: The weather for the next four days of the 2015 White Marlin Open was not kind to the fleet of 307 boats, and Deppe admitted that the last day, Friday, was one of the five roughest days he's ever fished. By day four, 616 whites had been caught, but only nine were weighed, and of that, only one qualified — a 94-pounder caught by Cheryl McLeskey of Virginia Beach, Virginia. It turned out to be the grand prize winner, making McLeskey the first woman to win the White Marlin Open. Disappointed but not discouraged, Deppe and his band of brothers were already preparing for the MidAtlantic Tournament, just 10 days away. 



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A WELL-DESIGNED FLYBRIDGE IS ESSENTIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL SPORTFISHERMAN
BY CHRIS LANDRY



Although the cockpit on a big sportfisherman might resemble a battlefield, the flybridge is the command center and needs to be properly set up.

Capt. Terry “Tex” Moore likens the flybridge of a convertible sportfisherman to a war room. “It’s the place where everything begins and ends,” says Moore, who ran Bertram’s demo boats in tournaments for years and is the longtime personal captain for NFL analyst and former coach Jimmy Johnson. “This is where the battle is waged.”

Everything should flow through this elevated nerve center of the boat, Moore says, with all of its parts and appendages working with the captain as one. For that to happen, a flybridge’s every detail must be carefully thought out and executed.

“There’s so much that takes place in the design stage to make it all

work,” says John Bayliss, a former charter captain and the owner and founder of builder Bayliss Boatworks in Wanchese, North Carolina. “You’re going to build the boat once and only once, so you better get it right because there’s no turning back.”

Seasoned captains and boatbuilders know the key elements of a well-designed flybridge — from the height of the helm chair to the placement of the console to the grommets that the teaser lines pass through. Aloft in their perches for hours at a time, skippers demand clear sightlines, an uncluttered deck, smart seating and storage, a hardtop that protects without smothering, dependable

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Clear sightlines, easy-to-read displays and good access to teaser reels are elements of a strong flybridge. The 48-foot Garlington, Grace, shown here.

and easily operated electronics, and a helm they can command with their eyes closed.

Cut the clutter

It seems obvious, but a standout flybridge must have clear sightlines in every direction. You'd be surprised how many fall short in this area, says Skipper Gentry of Lighthouse Point, Florida, who runs a 46-foot 1989 Post, *Carolina Gentleman*. "A lot of boats have two vertical chase pipes from the helm to the hardtop," he says. "I like a single 1-1/2-inch pipe on the starboard side of the bridge. I want a limited amount of obstructions in front of me. Cut down the vision clutter. The fewer pipes, the better."

Convertibles have substantial foredecks, so a good view of the horizon is not a guarantee on big rigs. Moore, who stands 6 feet tall, uses a 6-inch step-up platform at the wheel to help him see over the bow and over the heads of others on board. "I want to be taller than them so I can talk to them but still look around and keep my eye on everything else," he says.

At the helm, the skipper should be able to see the aft portion of the cockpit, says Capt. Ryan Higgins, Viking's southeast sales manager, who runs two demo boats — a 62 and a 70 — in 15 to 20 tournaments a year, including the major marlin competitions. "An extended overhang does keep shade on the mezzanine, but you still want to see the anglers and the rod tips in the cockpit corners," says Higgins. "That's a minimum; our boats are usually better than that."

The skipper's day on the flybridge typically begins early and ends late. "I am up there from the time I hit the [engine] start button to the time I hit the stop button, which is probably 16 hours in some cases," says Higgins.

A good hardtop on an open flybridge protects people and equipment, but it also should easily accept a canvas enclosure with isinglass panels. The zippers, snaps and Velcro must work without a fuss and stand up to the salty environment.

"We replace the panels every few years," says Randy Yates, 40, skip-

per of a 2005 Viking 52 that fishes sailfish tournaments on the East Coast. "You don't want them clouding up or getting creased." The plastic on the Viking is cleaned regularly and treated with an anti-scratch protectant.

The hardtop holds antennas for radar, GPS and satellite communications, along with remote spotlights and perhaps a thermal imaging camera. But its underside is just as important, housing tackle, storage boxes and electronics. "The more you can get into the overhead, such as the engine readouts so you can look up at those in an overhead drop box, the better," says Moore. "I'd rather have to look up than down."

Gentry agrees. He glances at a spread of five 4-inch displays in the hardtop — three show engine data and two show rudder angle and sea temperature. Gentry can call up depth or autopilot readouts, as well. He keeps two VHF radios up here, including a remote microphone for a wireless unit. Pointing directly at him, the speaker barks loud and clear.

On a Viking convertible, the hardtop typically houses an integral overhead compartment with as many as four electric teaser reels, says Higgins, who is also part of the team that designs the New Jersey builder's flybridges. "We cater to the captains," he says. "Dredge fishing has become a must for light-tackle marlin fishing, which means pulling four teasers, so we've had to change our teaser reel boxes for more teasers — two surface teasers and two larger reels for your dredges, which have a very heavy load."

Setting up and working the teasers joins the growing list of duties the captain carries out, says Moore. "I have noticed recently that some of the crews are getting away from the four teasers on the bridge and going to two in the cockpit and two in the overhead on the bridge," he says. "I think two teasers is adequate to have in the overhead. Let the guys in the cockpit run the dredges to keep things simpler and lighten the load on the captain, who can pay more attention to running the boat and safety."

The teaser lines run through channels inside the hardtop, exiting each side. "The pathways have to be completely free of burrs — you



Skippers on active sportfishing boats are kept busy. Viking tournament captain Ryan Higgins says the teaser reel boxes have to handle increasing loads.

Anglers Journal

A photograph showing a person's hands, wearing a white and dark blue jacket, holding a large fish (likely a tuna) over a body of water. The fish is silver with a blue and green stripe along its side. The background is a blurred view of the water.

PHOTO: GRANT MONAHAN

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All switches, buttons, knobs and controls should be within easy reach of the skipper. The angle of the wheel, position of the controls and height of the helm chair all make a difference when you're spending long hours on the bridge.

don't want to be forced to change your line, especially if you are trying to pull dredges from up there," says Bayliss. "The entry and exit hole into the tube has to be faired really well. A piece of stainless with nice round edges does the trick."

Physically friendly helm

Convertible captains need the controls, buttons and switches within easy reach, which helps them keep their eyes free to look aft or to the sides. "The bow thruster switches are now on the controls — that's something they've added in the past few years," says Higgins. He uses a thumb button on each lever to move the bow to port and starboard. "Now you can do it all without taking your hands off the controls. Every little edge you can get counts out there."

Many skippers like the wheel canted about 20 degrees and the throttles at a height that's comfortable for the elbows and wrists. "I don't want to keep my arms bent all the time, which can be straining," Moore says. "Depending on the boat, I might have to slide my hand down the shaft to the bottom to straighten my arms."

The number, size and height of the helm chairs also is important. "Most of the time you're standing, but you still want good visibility when you're sitting," says Gentry. "I need to move my helm chairs higher so I can sit and see the bow easily. The bottom of your seat should be on the same plane as the bottom of the steering wheel."

Gentry also removes the seat backs for better sightlines aft.

Most captains prefer to be alone on the flybridge, but there must be room to accommodate others. "If I was building a boat for me to just go fishing, I would have one chair," says Bayliss. "It's a game of inches up there. OK, you want three chairs? Well, how much room do we have, and will the captain be able to navigate around them well enough?"

On Viking convertibles 62 feet and up, the builder mounts three helm chairs and two side bench seats that include forward-facing backrests on the aft ends. As a designer, Higgins stays away from aft-facing seats. "[They're] fine for sitting at the dock, but when running you'll be sliding off them," he says. There's also a transverse seat on the forward side of the helm console for guests who like to feel the wind in their hair while taking in the view, he says.

The two bench seats double as lockers for 7-foot rods. "A lot of spinning rods go in there — the lighter tackle, 20- to 30-pound tackle," says Higgins. Extended trips might require stowing bait and food for months, so a huge cooler forward easily holds several cases of bait.

Higgins spends as much as 16 hours a day on the flybridge, so he keeps a small refrigerator packed with drinks, sandwiches and snacks up there. Peeing over the side is not an option, but they do find other ways to relieve themselves discreetly without going below.

Anglers Journal

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Open or closed flybridge?

"I don't like an enclosed bridge because you can't fish a boat like this properly, in my opinion," says Moore. "I think most tournament fishermen would say you need an open bridge."

However, an enclosed bridge is nice in rough seas or foul weather. "An enclosed flybridge gives you unbelievable comfort for running but limits fishing, so you have to have great electronics and visibility from the tower," says Joe Mazzarella, a Palm Beach, Florida, captain who runs a 76-foot enclosed bridge Viking for an owner and on charters. "You're going to mostly fish from the tower on closed-bridge boats."

On large convertibles, such as Mazzarella's 72 and Higgins' 70, the center helm has become popular, allowing for easy 360-degree movement around the flybridge. "For about 10 years we have had the center console," says Higgins. "It has become a fixture."

The boat must be at least 60 feet to have a center helm that you can walk around, says Bayliss. "You must have a big enough boat with a big enough console to allow for electronics and still have walkaround space," he says.

The flybridge hatch (usually just abaft the helm chairs), ladder and rails should be designed with safety in mind. "You need space around the opening so someone doesn't bang their head on the helm seat on the way up or down," says Moore, who also likes rails around the hatch opening.

Moore and others say the flybridge ladder or stairs should be comfortable to ascend and descend, with sturdy railings and easy-to-reach grab rails. The steps "should be of a good size and have some traction to them," adds Bayliss. "I've found that teak-covered steps work well."

Viking has created larger hatch openings on some of its convertibles to allow room for a ladder with wider steps, increasing the safety factor.

Full stairways are offered on models larger than 52 feet, says Higgins.


Rails surrounding the perimeter of the flybridge must be beefy and sturdy without hindering sightlines, says Gentry. "I like a nice clean rail that hits me at the hip," he says. "I have just one double-rail with the rails four or five inches apart, so you can put rod holders there." The Post has seven.

Moore prefers a higher aft double rail with rod holders. "You want it at belly height in case you slip," he says. "When you fall into a lower rail you're more likely to go over."

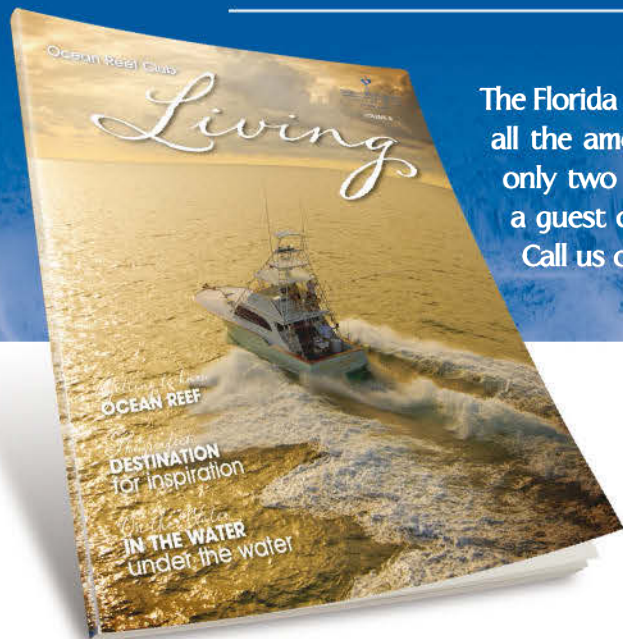
Safety also depends on effective communication between flybridge and cockpit. Some crews use wireless headsets, but good communication often boils down to teamwork. "The ideal situation is when you have crews that stay together for a long time," says Bayliss. "Ideally, a fish comes in, and there's really not a whole lot said. Everyone knows what to do — without words."

Chatter should be controlled and productive, adds Bayliss. "I have seen [captains] who are too excitable," he says. "If somebody is up there yelling and screaming, it tends to disrupt the crew, and things can get chaotic and ineffective. People tend to get nervous, especially when they're not completely comfortable in the first place and don't necessarily know what's going on."

And communication starts before the boat leaves the dock, Bayliss says. "You need to walk the anglers through what will happen on that day — how things will unfold, tell them, 'Here is what I expect to happen today.'"

Then the captain climbs to his perch and begins conducting the day's events from one of the most vital stations on an offshore sportfishing boat. "When you look at these boats you tend to focus on the cockpit," says Moore. "But it's a mistake to overlook the flybridge's importance. As a captain, I know I can't afford to." 

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Trending

ADVICE FROM A VETERAN ELECTRONICS INSTALLER ON EQUIPPING YOUR HELM FOR FINDING FISH
BY DANIEL HARDING JR.



Electronics installer Bill Beyer practices what he preaches. The helm on his Contender 25 is clean, and the displays are easy to read and access.

Bouncing over short seas, we bank west and leave Bimini in our wake. The sun has just crested the horizon, but time is of the essence. In a few hours, Bill Beyer's many customers at an HMY Yachts rendezvous back in Bimini will awaken and begin peppering the marine electronics expert with questions.

At this moment, however — baits rigged, rods ready — Beyer is free from his duties as president of Marine Electronics Solutions, a sales and installation company in West Palm Beach, Florida. He's just a guy enjoying a passion that hooked him at the age of 10.

Beyer cuts the Contender 25's engines, and the early-morning drowsiness burns off as lines go in and he begins drifting for dolphin. With a look of contentment on his face, Beyer settles in at the helm and reflects on his career. Seven years ago, just as the recession was taking hold, Beyer left what he calls a "good, stable job" at Viking Yacht Co. to go into business for himself, selling and installing marine electronics.

I'm surprised. Beyer laughs.

"Yeah, I was really oblivious to the economy at the time, which made it a huge challenge," he says.

His love of fishing led him to this precarious start, but another passion helped see him through it. "I took my first flying lesson in 1986," Beyer says. "I was 10 years old. Being a pilot is what saw me through the hard times. A lot of guys fish the small Out Islands because the fishing is so good. ... I could fly out there and fix all their electronics."

What also kept him afloat when the economy — and boat sales — tanked was an increase in demand for electronics refits, which Beyer estimates comprised 85 percent of his business. He learned that the most important aspect of a successful refit is neither the equipment nor budget, but understanding how customers will use their boat.

"You need to understand their goal," says Beyer, who is a preferred installer for HMY Yachts, a dealership with locations in Florida and

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South Carolina. “Where and what do they want to fish for? Are they fishing the tournament circuit or fishing for leisure? There are probably 10 to 12 questions I ask right off the bat, and from there I can usually figure out what they need. You see, I’m really a casual fisherman now, so I have a 1-kW [sounder] transducer. If I fished every day, I’d go with the big 3-kW CHIRP.”

Another key consideration when contemplating a helm refit is the age of your electronics. Beyer says that although many people hope to get 10 years or more from their equipment, “the reality is that most equipment has a 5-year shelf life. If HMY sells a 5-year-old boat, I’ll take a look at it and make my recommendations. If the stuff is still good and I think they can get a few more years out of it, then we’ll try that.”

To get the most out of marine electronics, Beyer recommends buying the newest technology your budget allows because today’s systems can be built upon and updated more easily than systems from just a few years ago.

During the past two years, Beyer has seen a shift in demand from refits back to installs on new boats, to the point where his business is now 50/50 between the two. I ask what new equipment his serious fishing clients want, and he responds without hesitation: CHIRP (compressed high-intensity radiated pulse) sounder technology. “CHIRP is where it’s at. That’s what people are demanding,” Beyer says. “Think of it like this. Older bottom machines traditionally send two signals down and back up. CHIRP is like going to an opera. ... The technology has totally changed, just like when everything switched from analog to digital. It’s almost made it an unfair advantage for the fisherman.”

Among the reasons for CHIRP’s popularity, explains Beyer, is its ability to let you spot fish near the bottom while also seeing bait higher up in the water column. CHIRP sounders emit a pulse that crosses a wide range of frequencies from low to high, all at once. Processors

separate the returns from these pulses and decipher the information to create a detailed image of bottom, structure and suspended fish. Wrecks can appear as actual boat outlines. Enhanced target separation turns masses of baitfish into individual fish marks, with the ability to recognize nearby predators. Slight changes in bottom hardness that often hold fish can show up more clearly, especially in deep water.

Another system that Beyer sees growing in demand is high-definition radar. “They’re similar to CHIRP in that they’re scanning at a much larger spectrum than they used to,” he says. “The digital target depiction is incredible. If you have the power and learn how to tune it, you can see three times as much as you could have seen 10 years ago. It’s changed that much. The processing is just that different.”

The sharper radar displays help fishermen spot birds, and thus fish, from greater distances. With the proper power and tuning, Beyer says it’s possible to spot a single bird as far away as three miles.

Another use for high-definition radar is tracking weather, which allows users to skirt localized storms and fish more safely. “Weather technology has made huge advances,” says Beyer as he swipes his finger across his Raymarine MFD. “This is Sirius Weather, which runs like Sirius Radio. It’s a great tool. You can see that’s a pretty bad storm over there. This helps for planning and forecasting out to five days.”

Zooming out reveals several nasty fronts surrounding Bimini but leaving one clear, though diminishing, route back to the marina. Beyer hammers the throttles. With a few swipes on his MFDs, he sets a radar overlay on two sets of charts of varying scales so he can snake around the fronts, with hardly a drop of water (or sweat) landing on deck.

It’s an appropriate reminder that today’s equipment will not only help you catch fish, but also help you bring them back to the dock. 🐟

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I'm old enough to remember when a cousin's 18-foot Lyman with twin Johnson 30s was the only outboard I knew that could fish the open Chesapeake Bay safely. Good thing, because boats like her taught me what seaworthy little vessels can accomplish, so I've never had ambitions for larger or faster rigs.

In fact, I've been stuck around 17 feet for the past 44 seasons, most recently with *First Light*, my Boston Whaler Montauk (23 seasons and counting). There's value in an able hull this size laid out so her people can run standing up, clustered around the center console for balance, holding sturdy handrails, absorbing waves by flexing their knees.

First Light has worked all her life. Six-pack-legal, she handles multiple tasks for my "day job" at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation while serving as a project platform for the boating magazines I contribute to. She can shinny into tidal ponds on the Severn River around Annapolis, but also can make the open-water run from Crisfield, Maryland, to CBF's environmental education center on Tangier Island, Virginia.

In service to the National Park Service's all-water, 1,800-mile Capt. John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, she has explored all of the Chesapeake's major rivers, usually with fishing rods aboard. She has carried national television crews, monitored water quality, surveyed sites for restoration oyster reefs and fished those reefs for rockfish (stripers), speckled trout and white perch.

For the past 17 seasons, her power has been 60-hp Mercury 4-strokes with BigFoot (now Command Thrust) lower units and four-blade aluminum propellers (currently a 13.8-by-13-inch Merc Spit-Fire), which give her great trim control and power to plane off any load we should carry. These light engines balance her well; she planes at 10 knots, a characteristic that has gotten us home from Tangier on some snotty days.

Did I mention that her average fuel burn across her typical 10-month season is less than a gallon an hour? Last fall, we fished an all-day local tournament on 3.5 gallons. Her current engine is a 2012, and last year she had her bottom barrier-coated. She may last longer than I do. 🐟

John Page Williams is the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's veteran senior naturalist. He's also a longtime contributing editor for Boating magazine and editor-at-large for Chesapeake Bay magazine.

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